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MYSTERY

MAGAZINE



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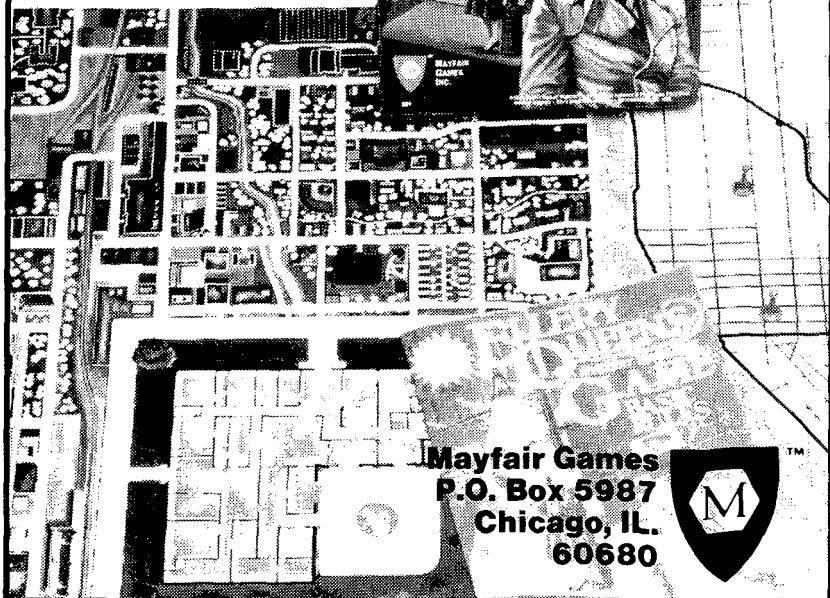
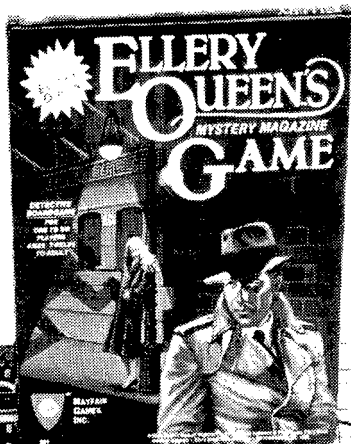


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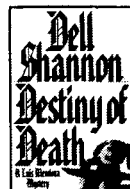


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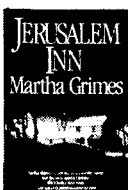


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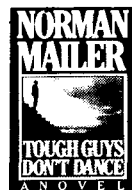


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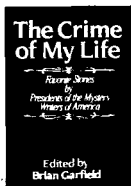


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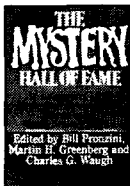
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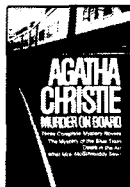
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

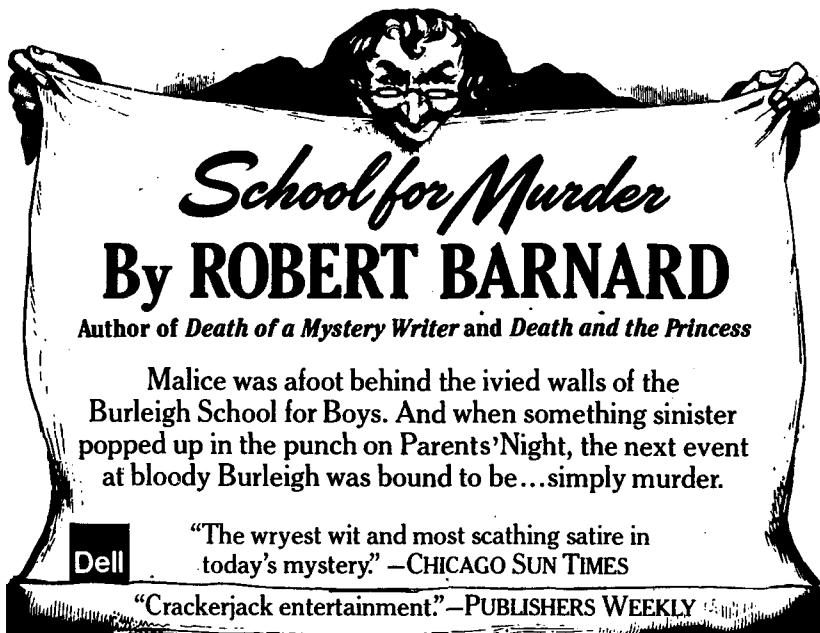
by Cathleen Jordan

**H**itchcock films and television shows are back in the news this spring, it seems. The five motion pictures that were re-released to movie houses about a year ago—*Rear Window*, *Vertigo*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Rope*, and *The Trouble with Harry*—have been licensed to The Movie Channel, a national pay cable service, for airing in April, May, and June, starting on April 21 at eight o'clock with *Rear Window*. In May, look for *The Trouble with Harry*, and in June for all five movies, to be shown on Tuesday nights.

At about the same time, NBC will be bringing us a remake of several episodes from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, the television series of the 1950's and 1960's. Four of the original half-hour stories have been re-done (in color) and will be broadcast together as a single two-hour presentation complete with the famous Hitchcock introductory comments. The show will be aired sometime this spring (probably in May).

In the meantime, in this issue . . . We are especially pleased to bring you Arthur Train's "The Meanest Man" as

this month's Mystery Classic. Train's most famous creation, the estimable old lawyer Ephraim Tutt, stars, of course, and if you haven't met him before, we recommend him to you. Mr. Tutt, who made his first appearance in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1919, headed a law firm in New York City—a comfortable and decidedly unstuffy set of chambers inhabited by Mr. Tutt; Tutt, his partner (no relation); office boy Willie Toothacher; Minerva Wiggin, expert office manager and a lawyer herself; Bonnie Doon, legman; and several others. Many of the stories are set in New York, but a great many others (and the ones we like best) take place in Pottsville, an upstate New York town where Mr. Tutt goes for his fishing vacations. The Pottsville denizens—Toggery Bill Gookin, Ma Best and her daughter Betty, Cy Pennypacker, and others—quickly become old friends, and among them all marches the scheming Squire Mason as Mr. Tutt's perennial foe. The "meanest man" of the title of our story is Squire Mason, up to his old tricks as usual, but this time facing Mr. Tutt on a court-



room floor as plaintiff rather than prosecutor.

In all the stories, Mr. Tutt—champion of the underdog, ingenious maven of the law—brings his considerable legal knowledge and skills to the defense of the accused. According to Barzun and Taylor's

*Catalogue of Crime*, the stories "were so sound in law—a foretaste of Perry Mason—that collections of them were assigned in law-school courses." Which makes them sound a bit dusty, but they're not at all: we think you'll be as charmed as we were by them.

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FICTION

# A Twenty-Five-Dollar Case by Stephen Wasylyk

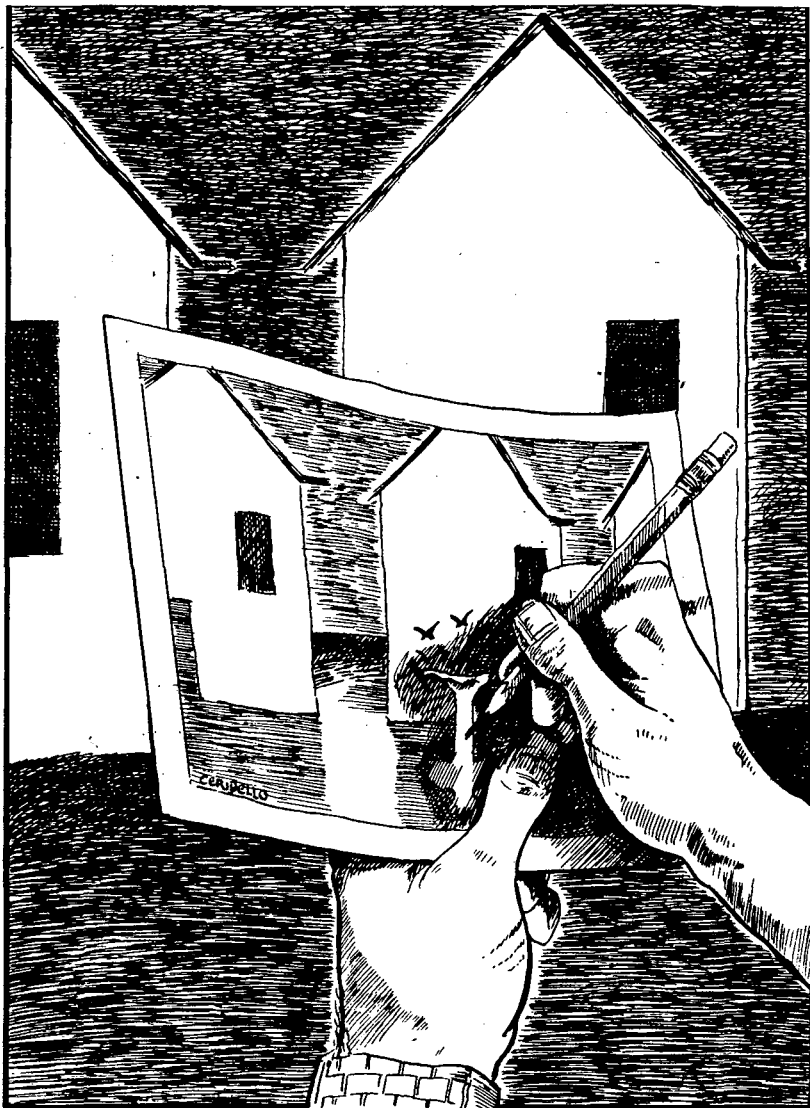


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Crossing the small square between the Fox River Court Building and the sheriff's office, I thoughtlessly came within range of Angus Bugg, as much a fixture in the square as the Civil War monument. Angus transfixed me with an accusing, seventy-year-old finger as I approached his bench.

"Been a year since she was killed, Gates."

After he'd retired, Angus had appointed himself overseer of the sheriff's office. I didn't really mind. He was as quick to congratulate as condemn, which is more than you can say about most people.

He nibbled at a doughnut held in both hands, looking like an oversized edition of the plump squirrels gathered at his feet waiting for crumbs to drop.

"We'll get there, Angus," I said.

"Always said you were too young to be sheriff. You probably won't amount to much until you turn forty, so if you need any help, just ask."

I nodded. "I'll do that."

An aggressive squirrel clambered to the seat beside him. If he didn't watch himself, Angus would lose that doughnut before he knew it.

A year. I didn't need to be reminded.

Like an earthquake jarring

the stylus of a seismograph, certain events in a small town peak the running line of history and become reference points thereafter. The death of Penny York had jarred the stylus hard because there was absolutely no reason at all for anyone to kill her.

I was already hearing things like, "*Sure. I remember. 'Bout a month before Penny York was killed.*"

The town wouldn't forget her. I couldn't. To those of us who carry some sort of blotch on our souls, she was something rare and shining and to be treasured, one of those people who prove the human race isn't really a total disaster.

Julio looked up when I pushed through the door. "Sorry I'm late, Julio. Blame Swensen. When our dynamic county attorney says he wants to see you, he doesn't mean at your convenience."

Julio grinned, the white teeth a flash below the black mustache. "No problem. He does serve a useful purpose, you know. When I feel depressed, I fantasize about punching him in the nose and feel better immediately."

I indicated Carla's desk.

"Your backup will be a little late," he said. "Didn't say why." He retrieved his hat from the rack and settled it firmly by



running his hands around the brim, six feet plus of wide-shouldered, intimidating tan uniform. "You know where to find me if you need me."

"I won't call unless the Martians invade. A twelve hour shift is enough for any man. Go home and go to bed."

I placed the Penny York file folder in the center of my desk. It had been opened so many times the starchy stiffness had broken down and the dog-eared cover was ready to fall off. I really didn't have to open it. Everything in it was a permanent part of me. If someday I became senile, I'd still have total recall of every word, though I might not remember my name. Why did someone step through her kitchen door while she was preparing dinner, put two .38 slugs into her, and leave her for her husband to find?

I positioned the folder more precisely. The answer was somewhere in that file. I knew it, felt it, and cursed myself for being too stupid to recognize it when I saw it.

Carla opened the door quietly and slid behind her desk as if hoping I wouldn't notice her, which was ridiculous since she had to know I would have seen her come up the drive. The face that had launched a thousand calls from male residents using imaginary complaints as an ex-

cuse to talk to her was set, almost glowering.

I leaned back. "Why are you limping?"

I've been on the receiving end of cold looks, but when those blue eyes turn frosty, they make me think of Antarctica as a beach resort.

"That is none of your business."

"Of course it is. Suppose you are called upon to chase a desperate criminal through the alleyways of Fox River?"

"There is no record of any law enforcement officer's ever having chased a desperate criminal through the alleyways of Fox River. I see no reason for it to happen now."

"You could be wrong, but aside from that, I want to know because I am a caring, sensitive human being who only wishes to help."

She stared at me. "You? Sensitive?"

"People come to me for instruction. Remember, psychiatrists tell us that when we suffer trauma, no matter how small, sharing it will ease the pain. Place your burden on my broad shoulders. It will make your suffering easier to bear."

She set an elbow on her desk and her chin in her hand and stared at me thoughtfully. "What's wrong with you this morning?"

"Nothing is wrong with me. I merely want to know why you are limping."

"And I'm not telling you, Mr. Sensitive."

"Maybe you should drive over to the hospital and have Blenheim take a look at your foot."

"Leave that quack out of this."

"That's a strange remark. The two of you were just about to make the local gossip column."

"Only in your head. Let's get down to business. What's on the agenda for today?"

I reached for my hat. "Your agenda is to sit at your desk and answer the phone. My sensitivity won't permit one half of my staff staggering around town to the jeers and catcalls of the townspeople."

"I get it. You've been reading again," she said suspiciously. "What book has turned you on now?"

I opened the door. "*How to Prepare Sensitive Sushi for Your Sensitive Friends in a Sensitive Atmosphere*. I'll call in from time to time."

I closed the door, held it for a moment, then opened it again. "Why *are* you limping?"

Her fingers drummed on the desk top. "If I throw something at you, do the usual assault laws apply, or is that one of the fringe benefits of being one of your deputies?"

Fifteen minutes later, I turned the four-wheel drive onto the side road where Penny York had lived.

The house was one of a half-dozen two story boxes erected in a row. At the time of the killing they were so new they were still damp inside, and no one had yet added those personal touches that make each home different; six peas in a pod with identical shrubbery and sodded lawns in a pocket gouged out of the forest that ended some hundred feet from their back doors.

The late summer day had been rainy and foggy and none of the neighbors had seen or heard a thing. Carla, Julio, and I all agreed the killer must have stepped out of the woods, crossed the wet grass of the back yard, opened the door, killed her, and escaped the same way, leaving nothing behind but the two .38 slugs Dr. Blenheim had removed from her body and a few damp footprints on the smooth tile floor which had half-evaporated by the time we arrived.

We reasoned that he parked a car somewhere nearby, but the casts we took of tread tracks in the mud all belonged to cars with a legitimate reason for being there.

The logical place to start on

any murder is the immediate family and then to widen out to all of the victim's acquaintances, but the only family Penny had was her husband and it had taken Blenheim months to get him under control. He was still walking around in shock.

We went through the acquaintances one by one. It was the damndest thing. We talked to almost a hundred people and didn't find one without an alibi, although we did learn a great deal about infidelity. There must have been fifteen husbands or wives who arrived home late for dinner that night with the excuse that their cars had broken down. Why so many decided to conduct their extra-curricular activities at dinnertime was beyond me. How passionate can you get with a growling stomach?

I left the four-wheel drive and walked down the road. It wasn't much. Just a two-lane blacktop that wandered through the trees. The six houses still sat alone, surrounded by woods, but they no longer looked alike. The shrubbery had been rearranged here and there, and the trim on several had been repainted to a color more to the owner's liking. Three now had mesh fences around the back yards, a German shepherd eyeing me suspiciously from one.

The elderly man stabbing energetically with a trowel at the soil around a newly planted birch saw me coming. The hair was gray, the stomach slightly protuberant, but there was still plenty of power left in the wide shoulders and thick arms.

He swatted the dirt from his knees. "Back again, Gates? You're getting to be a fixture around here."

"You know why I'm here, Moose."

He settled his glasses with a practiced poke. "Wasn't faulting you. Seems to me you must have picked our brains clean long ago."

"Couldn't have, or I'd know the answer." I grinned. "Besides, Angus Bugg keeps the pressure on."

He snorted. "Bugg. Can't stand the man. Like a lot of people these days, he seems to think he deserves an award for getting old. Hell, it doesn't take any brains or talent. You just keep breathing and one morning you roll out of bed and look in the mirror and there you are. What did the old fool say?"

"Reminded me it's been a year."

"He would. Join me in a beer?"

"No, thanks. You said you were out front that night kicking away debris the contractor had left because it was backing water up over your lawn, so

you're sure no car came up the road."

"That's right. No car. Nobody walking, either."

"But someone could have left the car at the end of the road and come up through the back yards."

"Sure." With a thumb he scraped thoughtfully at caked mud on his trowel. "You hinting at something? Like someone from one of the houses might have sneaked up the back way, too?"

"Not really. Just getting things clear."

He had something and he wouldn't let go. "Could have left the car down at the end, come up the rear, killed her, gone back the same way, and driven the car up as though he were just arriving home."

I didn't say anything.

"Gives you your choice of two men," he said. "Penny's husband and Syl Durham. Both arrived home within a few minutes of each other. As a matter of fact, Syl was just getting out of his car when he heard Penny's husband yell." He shrugged. "Aw, hell, Gates. You know all that already. What are you trying to do?"

"Jog your memory to get one thing out of you that you forgot in the excitement. Sometimes these things pop out before you realize it."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "I told you before. My eyes are going bad, not my memory. Sure you don't want a beer?"

"Another time, Moose. I'll just wander around."

Penny's husband still lived in the York house, why I didn't know, except that he probably felt life wouldn't be any easier if he moved. His was the one house that remained as it was a year ago, which is understandable. Wives are usually the motivating force behind the changes to any home.

The back yard of the Durham place, next door, was surrounded by green wire mesh fence that ran all the way to the trees. The grass was clipped short, flower beds had been started, and most of the plants had bloomed, splashes of color against the green.

A cardinal strutted around the rim of a heavy-looking cement birdbath in the center of the yard as though he were on parade. He cocked his head at me and took off.

A woman's voice softly said, "Damn."

"My fault," I said loudly.

Mae Durham stepped around the corner of the house. She was in her late thirties, like Penny, a short woman with her dark hair caught up in a bandana, shapeless in an oversized man's shirt and loose jeans.

I nodded at the birdbath. "Sorry to screw up your shot."

She smiled. "No harm done. I already have several good ones, and he'll be back."

"How's the bird photography business?"

"It isn't a business. Only a hobby that earns a few dollars now and then. Come on in."

A netting sloped from the back of the house to the ground, creating a sun-speckled blind. It concealed a beach chair and a tripod-mounted camera with a telephoto lens that poked through the netting like a round black snout.

"Given up the field trips?"

She shook her head. "Hardly. This is a busman's holiday. Something in particular bring you here or are you refusing to give up? After all, it's been—"

"A year. People keep reminding me."

She cocked her head like the cardinal. "You really think you'll find out who did it, don't you?"

"I may have a white beard down to my knees and he may be dead and buried, but I'll find him."

"You say *he*."

"A generic term. I don't discount the possibility it was a woman."

"Does that mean I'm still a suspect?"

"Along with a great many

others. I hope that doesn't hurt your feelings."

"No. I understand your position. We're all under a cloud. I just wish I could help. I'll always curse myself for running to the front of the house to check the street when I heard those two thumps. If I'd looked out the kitchen window, I might have seen the killer leave."

I indicated the camera. "Do you mind?"

"Help yourself."

I peered through the viewfinder. She had focused on the rim of the birdbath, and the lens brought it in tight and textured, the grain of the cement almost sparkling in the sunlight.

I spoke carefully so she wouldn't read anything into my voice. "You know, we took Penny back to the fourth grade, looking for a reason, and I asked quite a few people this question but I never asked you. Do you have any reason to believe that she might have been having an affair?"

The grass inside the fence had been mowed recently. So had that in the York yard next door. I knew that Syl had taken it on himself to do both. If it had been left to Penny's husband, the weeds would have been knee high.

"Like me, you mean?" Her voice was bitter.



I turned to face her. "No. I told you at the time it was your business, not mine. I meant it. As far as I'm concerned, you were in New York, where Syl thought you were. But I had to ask about Penny because you were so close, you decided to buy these houses together. Everyone else laughed at the idea of Penny's having an affair, but then they didn't know her the way you did."

"She wasn't the type."

"That's an evasion. There is no type. We all run around looking for something we don't have."

The cardinal swooped back, dipping his head into the water and shaking it.

"If she did, she never told me."

"Did you tell her?"

She hesitated. "Words aren't necessary between some people. That's why you can believe me when I say she didn't."

"And that's exactly why I had to ask."

I placed a hand on the gate and nodded at the cardinal. "Looks as though your red-headed friend can't resist becoming the centerfold for the January issue of *Female Finch*."

I slid through the gate and took a few steps.

"Wait."

She was holding the top of the gate with both hands, knuckles

white. "I think you should know. He broke it off not long after you saw us. They say hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, and they're right. I was never proud of what I was doing, but when he ended it, I was hurt enough to say a great many things I didn't mean. That bothers me more than anything. I wish I could have walked away with dignity."

I smiled. "I say that at least three times a week."

When I called in, Carla told me Swensen had phoned, demanding my presence. I'd always had a high regard for the intelligence of the electorate in Fox River County, particularly since they consistently voted for me, but when they put Swensen into the county prosecutor's office I wondered if they were slipping. Possessed of a personality that shifted between obnoxious and detestable, he was using the office only as a stepping stone to bigger and better things. Even the judges were tired of him.

I headed back. From the beginning, I'd felt that the two people most likely to help in the murder of Penny York were Moose and Mae because they were the next door neighbors. As open as they'd been, one or the other knew something I should know and had either forgotten it or thought it was un-

important, so I kept chipping away at them both.

Carla had removed her shoe, opened a lower desk drawer, and propped her leg across it.

I grinned.

Her voice was frosty. "Don't say a word."

"Why don't you go home and soak it in a bucket of water?"

"I'm merely uncomfortable, not incapacitated."

"Wait until you try to put that shoe on again."

"I came prepared." She scooped a very feminine powder blue satin slipper out of the drawer and dangled it on one finger.

I slid behind my desk. "I didn't know you wore those."

"What did you think I wore?" she snapped.

"I never really thought about it, but that slipper conjures up an image of a flowing, matching negligee, candlelight, and soft music."

I could see her taking a deep breath. I held up a hand.

"Before you say it, remember that an aching whatever is not justification for calling your employer names."

She pointed at the phone, the words as cold as Fox River in winter. "Call Swensen."

"Let Torquemada wait. I have

more important things to do." I flipped open the Penny York file.

She leaned forward, eyes interested. "You came up with something?"

"Nothing I can put my finger on, but then I haven't been able to put my finger on anything for a year."

"Let's make a deal. If you promise I can bring him in when we find him, I'll tell you what happened to my foot."

I shook my head. "Bad trade. That's a pleasure I reserve for myself and eventually I'll find out about your foot anyway."

Julio had used up a roll of film on the kitchen and the exteriors of the houses, taken from different perspectives and distances. I'd gone over all of them many times with a magnifying glass. Nothing had struck me as out of the ordinary.

As I flipped the pack over, the slippery glossies slid and separated, a couple falling to the floor. I scooped them up. Both were of the rear of the houses taken from the edge of the trees and what the killer would have seen if he had approached that way.

Something in them hit me so hard my heart slowed and almost stopped. I placed them side by side. From a hundred feet away, Julio had caught

three houses, the York house in the center, identifiable only because Carla and I stood at the back door. No fences then, just the flat lawn sweeping up to the identical facades. And something else.

I leafed through the rest of the exterior shots. It was there all right, eliminating any question that the angle was deceiving or that the negatives had been printed in reverse.

I arranged everything neatly and closed the file. There was a box on my desk about six inches square. I pulled a ten dollar bill from my pocket, folded it deliberately, and dropped it through the slit on top.

Carla's eyes widened. "Did I just see you drop ten dollars into the Stupid Box?"

"You did. And if the limit wasn't ten, it would have been more."

"A penalty like that could only mean that you know who killed Penny York."

"Not who. Why. Who is the next step."

She watched as I went to the filing cabinet and fingered through the manila folders in the top drawer.

"Anything I can help you with?"

I found the file I wanted and opened it on Julio's desk, which was next to hers.

She craned her neck to read

the name. "Hartford. I thought we'd closed that one out."

I copied a name and address from Julio's report. "We could have been wrong. You'll remember that Blenheim found a contusion on the back of his head that might or might not have been caused by the accident, but since we had nothing to indicate otherwise, we settled for the accident."

"Are you telling me that someone knocked Hartford out and sent him over the cliff into the river in his Camaro?"

"I wouldn't swear to it just yet, but that's what I have in mind."

"If you're right, then the three of us should get out of this business and take up accounting."

"Not necessarily. First of all, from the way he drove, we all knew he would kill himself eventually. Second, the man who killed him probably arranged it that way for our benefit. Third, the girl who was living with him said several times that no one had a reason to kill him and that he had gone out that night simply to have some beer. That checked out. The bartender remembered him and he would have been driving along that road on his way back to the girl's house."

"And now you don't think it happened that way."

"Because now I have a reason

to think otherwise, which we didn't have at the time."

She leaned back and folded her arms. "Are you going to share what you think or are you going to play John Wayne?"

I replaced the file and headed for the door. "Ask yourself one question. Knowing that Hartford was brutal, absolutely without conscience, in trouble more than he was out of it, had served time for a manslaughter that should have been murder, had no visible means of support, and was well down a path heading for self-destruction, could he have killed Penny York?"

"All that little speech means is that you don't intend to tell me anything and you *do* intend to go out and play John Wayne. I'll remember this, Duke."

I looked at her foot pointedly and slowly shook my head. "Yo. I don't need no help from no wounded woman, pilgrim."

Her voice dripped acid. "When Swensen calls, I'll tell him you're out drinking."

**T**he girl who had lived with Hartford had a stocky body, a cute face, and a close-cropped thatch of blonde hair. Although it was almost the end of summer, the shortsleeved blouse and shorts exposed skin that showed no trace of tan.

She invited me in reluctantly and wandered about the room straightening things as though she didn't want to face me.

"He's dead," she said. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

"You met him in November. He was driving a new Camaro and he always had money. You said Hartford told you it all came from a woman but he wouldn't tell you her name."

She moved a table lamp that didn't have to be moved, her hand trembling. "Why ask me the same things over and over?"

The shades were drawn, the door had two locks, and her eyes were shadowed against the paleness of her face.

I went over to her and lifted her chin with one finger so that she faced me. "You're afraid of something."

Her eyes dropped and she shook her head.

"You've been afraid since the day he died," I said gently. "Not a very nice way to live. Inside most of the time, chains on the door, looking over your shoulder when you do go out, not being able to sleep, and still knowing that no matter what you do, today might be the day you die."

She covered her face with her hands.

"He told you a great deal more than you told us," I said.

Face still covered, she shook

her head slowly. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

"I can't do that now, and you don't want me to. Whatever it is, you know you should have said something a long time ago. What did he tell you?"

"Nothing," she said. "That's the trouble. All he said was that if he turned up dead for me to be careful because someone wanted to kill him and they would come after me next because they would think I knew whatever he did."

"And you didn't think that was important enough to tell us?"

Her voice rose. "Suppose I did? I couldn't give you a name, so you'd start snooping around and then for sure whoever it was *would* come after me. I didn't want that. I wanted it to be an accident. Maybe it was. I told him a hundred times he'd kill himself in that car."

She had talked herself into it, but deep inside had never believed it and had lived with it and it had taken time to show.

"He might not have told you anything, but he wouldn't leave himself open. He would have protected himself. Did he ever say anything about that?"

"A couple of times. He said I didn't have to know who it was because he'd fixed it so that you would."

I could have shaken her. Eight

months ago those words would have made us work harder and dig deeper and it would have been over long ago. I took a deep breath. She was too young and too frightened to think clearly and the responsibility was really mine. I had walked away from Hartford's death too quickly.

"But he didn't tell you what that was, either," I said.

She shook her head. "All he said was that you were smart enough to figure it out."

"Did he leave anything with you?"

"Only some clothes. You know how he was. He lived out of his car. He'd stay with me for a while and then he'd take up with someone else."

"Do you still have the clothes?"

"I got rid of them." The eyes were suddenly defiant. "You don't have to worry. There was nothing in them. I'm not that stupid."

I placed a hand on her shoulder. "You're not the stupid one. I am. Stay inside and don't let anyone in you don't know. I'll be back as soon as it's settled."

If I could have said those words last January, she wouldn't have lost a summer out of her life and that was regrettable. People like Moose and Angus Bugg could tell her each one was precious.



Since Hartford had no relatives to claim his body and the girl couldn't afford the funeral, he had been buried by the county. By law, the personal effects found on his body and in the car were held for one year on the possibility that a relative might turn up, before being disposed of at the discretion of the judge.

In Fox River, storage of these effects was such a minor job it was taken care of by the custodian of the old files in the basement of the courthouse, a slight little man named Rugby.

He was at his desk, engrossed in a talk show emanating from the radio that served as a base for yet-to-be-filed documents. He held up a finger. "Hold it, Gates. I want to hear this."

I reached over and turned down the volume. "Now. You can worry about rabid raccoons later. I need Hartford's personal effects."

He looked up over the top of his half-spectacles. "Who do you think you're pushing around? Ever hear of cooperation? I could make you get a court order."

"I'll be happy to do it, but while I'm upstairs, I'll take a little time to look up the ordinance prohibiting personal radios in the court building."

"I bet you would." He fished a set of keys from a desk drawer and used one in the top drawer

of a file, pulled out a battered shoebox and handed it to me.

I waved the box at the radio. "Go back to the raccoons."

He was more interested in watching me.

Hartford had been twenty-four. There wasn't much to show for those years. A wallet, a watch, a ring, and a receipt stating the court was holding a little more than five hundred dollars, the total of the cash in his possession and the salvage value of the Camaro.

Because the wallet had been soaked when Hartford had plunged into the river, the leather was now stiff, the cards it held welded together.

I pried them loose from the compartment and slit them apart carefully with my pocket knife. Driver's license, owner's card, and nothing else.

I examined the wallet. All the compartments were empty. Whatever Hartford had thought I'd be smart enough to find wasn't there. It might have been in the car, but if it was, it was long gone. I flexed the stiff leather, working my way from one end of the wallet to the other. One corner wouldn't bend at all.

Alexander the Great had sliced the Gordian Knot with one stroke of his sword. I had always admired that way of thinking.

I slit the leather with the tip of the knife, the blade grating against metal, bent the wallet, and extracted a small key. Hartford had been right. What he hadn't anticipated was that it would take me eight months.

I palmed the key, replaced the wallet, and handed the box to Rugby.

He knew I'd taken the key. He also knew I had a friend who jumped up and down on everyday objects until they were flat, then mounted them and framed them and sold them as works of art, and that if he said anything his radio would be the next project.

**T**here were only two banks in town. I hit pay dirt in the first.

Stanhope Cramer turned the key over in his pudgy fingers. "Sure, it's one of ours. Where did you get it?"

"I want to see what is in the box."

"Can't do that without a court order."

I had known that bank presidents were tougher than file custodians because they spent half their lives saying no to people. I unfolded a sheet of paper and held it up. "Let's go."

He stood by while the middle-aged woman in charge of the safe deposit vault inserted her key along with mine and pulled

out the long flat metal box. I lifted the lid. The only thing inside was a folded sheet of paper, both sides covered with handwriting. It was dated the previous September, the spelling bad, the sentence structure rambling, but it was clear enough. So was the name mentioned throughout.

Life has a way of humbling me when I become too cocky. I'd been patting myself on the back until I read the statement.

Now I owed the Stupid Box another five dollars because the name wasn't the one I'd expected and if I didn't handle this carefully, I could blow the whole thing.

I fingered the paper, one of those ruled yellow sheets torn from what the stationers call a legal pad.

"Have a problem?" asked Stanhope.

"Wondering how I can make a realistic copy," I said.

He swelled a little. "Obviously you are unaware of the state of the art in copy machines. Fortunately, I am not. I recently purchased one that will solve your problem. It will copy on both sides of any type of paper. Come with me. I have a pad like that in my office. We'll take a sheet, send it through, and you won't be able to tell the original from the copy."

He wasn't entirely correct. Side by side, the original and the copy could be distinguished, but when held alone, the copy would fool almost anyone. Particularly a man under stress.

I patted Stanhope's shoulder. "A banker always makes wise decisions."

"True," he said. He patted the machine. "Enlarges and reduces, too."

"Bless the electronic age," I said.

**T**he court building was almost deserted, Swensen's secretary gone for the day when I walked into his office.

He was at his desk, a heavy man with dark hair, a square face, and a deep voice he used like an actor performing Shakespeare.

He let the voice roll with anger. "Where in the hell have you been? I've been trying to get in touch with you all day."

"A young guy named Hartford died last January in an automobile accident. Do you remember?"

"Of course I remember. It was closed out. Why bring it up now?"

"Because it was no accident." I handed him the copy of Hartford's statement. "This will explain it all."

He skimmed through it.

"Where did you get this?"

"Safe deposit box. I assume it's good enough to stand up in court?"

"A man could go to prison for a long time. Who else has read it?"

"No one."

He touched the flame of a lighter to the copy, dropping the remains into his ash tray after it was charred to nothing. "Too bad you didn't find anything in the safe deposit box, but I never did think you were much of a sheriff. What did you expect me to do with something like that?"

"Destroy it, naturally. I told you no one else has read it, but that was true only because it was a copy. Judge Kenrick has the original." I raised my voice. "Isn't that so, judge?"

Kenrick came in, a lean, hard, whitehaired man who had once been county prosecutor himself. He'd make a devastating witness.

Swensen's hands were flat on the desk, his face a mask.

"The judge didn't want to go along with this," I said, "but I pointed out we had no proof and you could claim Hartford wrote that statement out of sheer vindictiveness. You defended him on that manslaughter charge and he said a lot of nasty things about you when he drew three years. You should have

taken that route. By burning it, you admitted it was true."

I was seven steps away. I should have been five. I was in mid-air, diving over the desk, when the gun Swensen whipped out of the drawer went off. Even then I might have made it if he had tried for his head instead of his heart, my ears so close the report deafened me for an hour. I didn't mind. It took that long to get over the shock and decide I was slipping. Letting him kill himself was another ten for the Stupid Box and it had been a long time since I'd had a twenty-five dollar case.

**M**y ears were still ringing slightly. Carla and Julio sat in identical poses, hands tented, staring at me.

"Look," I said, "I don't like long-winded explanations. He hired Hartford to kill Mae Durham. Hartford shot the wrong woman, but he continued to bleed Swensen anyway. Why not? Swensen couldn't report him to the Better Business Bureau. So Swensen killed him."

"No, you don't," said Julio. "We've both worked too long and too hard to let you get away with that. What made you suddenly decide that Penny's death was a mistake?"

"The birdbath. That day it was in Penny's back yard, not

Mae's. Your pictures showed that. The contractor had moved it temporarily because he had to sod Mae's yard. That meant the killer probably didn't know Penny at all and had simply been told to kill the woman in the third house from the end, the one with the birdbath in the yard, which is exactly what Hartford said in his statement."

Carla rested her chin in her hand. "And what made you think of Hartford?"

Julio grinned. "That's easy. Once he figured the killer shot the wrong woman by going to the wrong house, the odds were he had been hired. There are only a few in Fox River capable of something like that. Hartford popped into his mind because there was the possibility the accident wasn't an accident. If he had struck out, he'd have gone to the next. Personally, I'd have hesitated about Hartford. I knew he hated Swensen."

"Who didn't?" I asked. "And what did that have to do with a chance to pick up some money and get a hold on Swensen at the same time?"

"Argue about it later," said Carla. "Why did Swensen want Mae dead?"

"They had an affair," I said. "Swensen broke it off because he intended to run for county prosecutor. Mae threatened to

make the thing public. If she did, his political career was out the window. There are places in the country where the electorate is tolerant of the peccadillos of its elected officials. Fox River isn't one of them. Being the kind of man he was, he saw no reason for a woman to stand in his way, so he hired Hartford to get rid of her. He must have been climbing the walls after Penny was killed. He couldn't go after Mae again. Those two dead within two weeks of each other could have blown the thing wide open. All he could do was curse Hartford and wait it out. What he didn't know was that when Mae cooled down, she decided to keep quiet. Sometime in the fall, he must have realized Mae had changed her mind and his only problem was Hartford. It took a few months to get around to him."

"So he almost lucked out," said Julio.

"He never knew how close he was," I said. "Until I read that statement, I was sure I was after Syl Durham. Swensen wasn't even in the picture. But when you talk about lucking out, think of Mae. If Swensen had gone to trial, she would have learned that Penny died because of her affair. That would have been worse than Syl's knowing about it, so I talked Judge Kenrick into maneuver-

ing things around so that no one gets hurt."

Carla smiled. "I like that. Maybe you are Mr. Sensitive, after all. Would you like to know what happened to my foot?"

"I already do. You went slow dancing with Dr. Blenheim, who not only looks like Abraham Lincoln but dances like him. He mashed your toes with one of his size 13 combat boots during a tango."

The eyes were frosty again. "You knew all along."

"Only because you were so insensitive to Blenheim's contriteness. The King of the Ballroom Dancers called me at breakfast, begging me to intercede on his behalf. I refused even though it hurt me deeply. He did the same thing to one of the nurses not so long ago. Almost crippled the poor woman. Fortunately, she knew of my outstanding sensitivity and turned to me in her hour of need. I doubt if anyone else could have helped her, since it was positively pitiful to see her limp about the bedroom, and I felt two such experiences would have hardened me to the point where I could assist no one in the future."

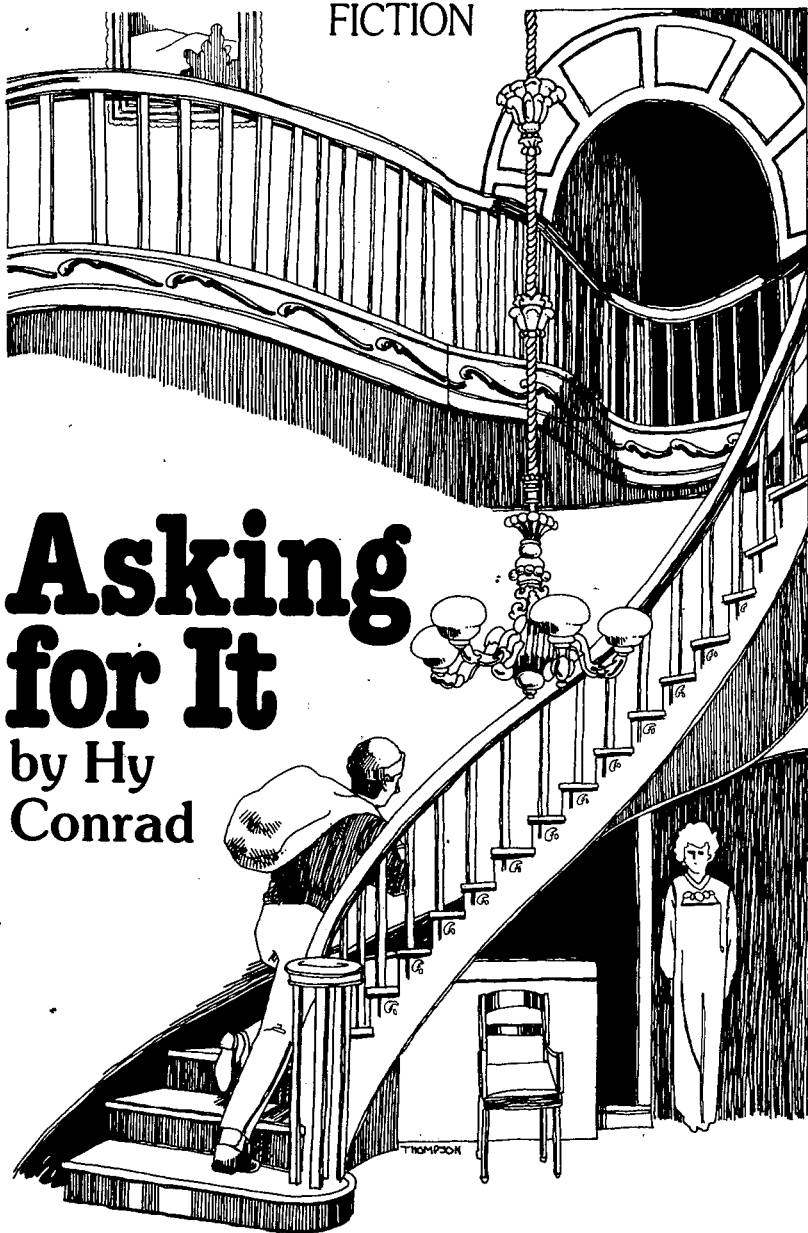
Going to Antarctica to get warm wouldn't have worked. Outer space would have been more like it.



FICTION

# Asking for It

by Hy  
Conrad



*Illustration by George Thompson*

““T he guy’s a bonafide idiot.”

Sunday’s paper was scattered across the dusty balcony that Teddy Aldridge liked to call his front porch. It was Tuesday afternoon and Mrs. Lopez down below had just gotten around to throwing it out. The TV section was missing as usual and a few pages were torn, but free was a bargain you don’t argue with.

A sudden desert breeze whipped the comic pages the length of the wooden floor and slapped them spread-eagled against the railing slats while a coupon insert wriggled its way to freedom.

Teddy didn’t care about coupons. You don’t get rich from coupons. You do it like Emmanuel Green and run a canning factory. That’s the only way in a town like this. But what you don’t do is turn around afterwards and advertise your money. That’s dumb.

Teddy shook his head and turned back to page one of the Home Living section so he could read it again. He was from back east, so he knew this wasn’t the way. You play it low profile with lots of security. “You’re lucky I’m such an honest guy, Manny.”

The headline covered three columns—GREENS’ GREENHOUSE BRINGS THE OUTDOORS

INDOORS—and there were all of four pictures if you counted the drawing. Just like a blueprint, he thought, and he knew he was getting serious. The only time Teddy didn’t blurt out whatever came into his head was when he was getting serious.

The first picture showed the greenhouse from the outside, a wall of steel-supported glass curving up the full two stories and sheltering not only a ground floor jungle but also an open bedroom on the balcony. “Imagine the joy of waking up to a tropical rain forest spread out below you.” The article went on to explain that this marvel was only a guest room because the lovey-dovey Greens couldn’t bear to give up their cosy boudoir facing the front garden.

The photo was detailed enough to reveal no paranoid little alarm strips edging the panes of glass. Teddy looked even closer and noticed a painting mounted on the guest room wall. He thought back to a Home Living section of a few months ago and wondered if this were the new Matisse, the one Manny had stood beside to illustrate that article.

Photo two was one of those shots where the photographer stands in a corner and tries to make the room look as big as possible. Even taking that into consideration it was impres-

sive, designed to give a feeling of space with nothing to interrupt the flow between greenery and living area.

The man's dying to be ripped off. Again unvocalized. Teddy pushed himself up from the weathered grey of the beanbag chair, stretched his slight, thin frame, and lazily threw his body onto the floor, the paper still in front.

The drawing was of the entire ground floor with dotted lines showing the extent of the old brick mansion's renovation. Almost unaware of what it meant, Teddy carefully tore the drawing out and stuffed it into his jeans' rear pocket.

Turning to the inside page, he studied the small photo of Ethel Green standing behind a lush potted flower. Had he ever seen her picture before? No, her hubby was always grabbing the limelight. No wonder she looked so sour.

"I guess some men like that kind of face," he said out loud. "God knows with his money—" He tried to imagine her twenty years younger and couldn't.

"Mr. Aldridge? Yoo hoo?"

Teddy held his breath, hoping the heavily accented voice would go away.

"I know you're there. I hear you talk to yourself."

"What do you want, Mrs. Lopez?"

"The first of the month was Friday. I got bills myself and the gas company and everyone ain't as friendly as me."

"In a couple days. I'm not so late."

"Not yet maybe." Their voices boomed back and forth, neither one wanting to move the dozen feet it would have taken to see the other. "You go down to the hiring yesterday at Green's?"

"We start next Monday. Ought to be a long season this year. Big tomato crop."

"Maybe I start getting my rent on the first, huh?"

The slamming shut of the screen door told him it was safe to go down. Getting to his feet, he beat the dust from the front of his T-shirt and jeans. How could she ask this kind of rent with the place so filthy? Some day he'd take her to court and sue; bring samples of her bad housekeeping.

Bounding down the stairs with a defiant loudness, Teddy threw his usual glance towards the garbage. Monday's paper was on top. Whatever ambition had propelled him to face the world suddenly faded as he pulled it out of the bin, sat on the bottom step, and started to read.

There was a council fight over handguns, Emmanuel Green and all of his influence pushing for a county-wide ban.

"Fat chance in this red neck of the woods," Teddy joked for no one to hear.

One by one he finished with the pages and flung them away, watching each double sheet fly down Commerce Street until he was left with only the single center page, Society and Religion. They were combined around here and not just in the paper.

Going straight was a mistake, he told himself, and coming here was a bigger one, even if it was just about the only place the Philadelphia cops wouldn't find him.

He'd lied to Mrs. Lopez. No way could he put in another season bending all day over a stream of rotting vegetables. The only thing that had saved him from a death of boredom was when he'd find himself alone and would spit on the tomatoes right before they were swallowed by the mixing vat, like target practice.

He was still in his twenties, he reassured himself, still young enough to start over, crooked or straight it didn't matter. If he could just get a little financial backing—

His eyes wandered over the page, skimming the text of Sunday's sermon and the events of the upcoming week. The name Green jumped out again.

A charity bazaar. Mr. and

Mrs. Green and the small fraction of locals with more than a dime to their names were getting together in favor of some disease, that's what it seemed to say. Tonight, from eight to midnight.

Teddy smiled and kept his thoughts to himself.

**I**t wasn't hard getting a gun. One stop shopping, Teddy mused as he stepped up to the pawn shop counter and hocked a Nikon and two lenses, the last of the Philadelphia plunder, for a Saturday Night Special. The guy in the cage asked for I.D., then told him to fill out a card. Teddy did both, not knowing how the guy might react if he voiced objections.

It don't matter, he thought as he wrote. I'm not using it. Anyway, soon as it's done I'm out of this burg. Let 'em try and find me.

And then he waited, dawdled over chicken pot pie in a highway diner until his watch said eight. "Don't be in such a rush." And he forced himself to spend an extra half hour dropping quarters into the pinball machine.

It was a short drive to the Greens' neighborhood, the town's one irrigated oasis. His battered pickup wouldn't look too out of place. A lot of these folks keep pickups, he ob-

served, their way of saying we're rich but hard-working.

He recognized it from the road. There were no front gates. Teddy switched off his headlights as he turned in, taking the long gravel path that led to the right and circled back to a garage area sheltered by hedges. The last two hundred feet were on a slight decline, and he cut his engine and glided to a nearly silent stop, not even using the brakes.

He sat there a minute, taking it in. Just the chirp of crickets and the whush of a sprinkler somewhere in the distance. It wasn't totally dark yet, but the Greens had done their share to help with enough landscaping around to hide an army.

As he tiptoed his way to the greenhouse door, Teddy could see through to the living room and the single lamp turned on. It was the usual "safety lamp," a tradition serving to reassure the burglar as much as it does the owner who flips it on right before leaving.

He slipped on a pair of thin leather gloves and tried the handle. At least Manny wasn't a complete idiot. A plastic tool-holder came out of his rear pocket and Teddy began working the lock with a miniature pick. His technique was a little rusty.

The "cosy boudoir" was first

on the list. That's where you get jewelry and emergency cash, not to mention the pillowcases you'll be needing. He'd once had a partner who brought his own Glad trash bags. Teddy thought that was about the most perverse thing he'd ever seen.

It was easy to find, the only upstairs room facing the front garden. "Nice," he whispered approvingly as he started on the dresser drawers. "Comfortable. But I think I'd still prefer the greenhouse room. Maybe I'll leave 'em a note saying that." He smiled as he moved on to the end tables.

The pickings were surprisingly slim—a hefty roll of twenties under the socks, a few pairs of cufflinks, gold and platinum, but there was next to no women's jewelry. Maybe Ethel was a little smarter and kept it locked up. He reminded himself to check every room for a safe, not that he'd know how to open it.

The pantry was next. He'd play it by ear, he told himself, taking just the most saleable. If he wound up with enough time and nerve, maybe he'd work his way upstairs to the Matisse.

A silver platter fell into the king-size pillowcase and clanked against a silver urn. Instinctively Teddy stopped and held his breath.

A second later he laughed out loud. Why was he worried? Just nerves or force of habit. There were no servants to wake, that had been made clear in a "People" story about down-home millionaires and their unpretentious lifestyles.

By the time he finished with the pantry he was whistling. He shook the pillowcases so the contents would settle and give him more room. He'd forgotten what fun this could be.

The clanging of silver and gold was like music. He focused on the sound, unlike any other—and that was why he didn't hear her, not until it was too late.

A high-pitched gasp made him turn. Ethel Green was standing in the doorway, just staring at his face. Shock had frozen them both. Then she disappeared. Her slipper-muted footsteps, running footsteps, echoed in Teddy's ears.

It took him another moment to recover, and then he was after her. Into the living room. But where had she gone from here? The safety lamp threw long shadows across the cavernous space.

The only evidence that she hadn't been a mirage was the quickly fading steps. Barely audible, they suddenly changed rhythm. Staircase. The rhythm changed back. Two seconds later

a door slammed and he heard—or did he only imagine?—the scratching sound of a key.

Okay, boy, don't lose your head. First the stairs. Teddy found them around the L-shaped room's hidden corner and took them two at a time. There was only one door at the top, no other within even five seconds of the stairs.

He tried the knob even though he knew it was the right door and locked. The miniature pick came out again. For some reason she'd taken the key from the keyhole, so it was clear sailing.

Teddy opened the door and stepped carefully into the balcony room. The last remnants of dusk visible through the greenhouse windows gave ghostly outlines to the furnishings—the jewelry box on the dresser, the slept-in bed, the painting above it.

Ethel Green's silhouette was crouched by the far railing. "What do you want?" The words came out small and frightened.

Teddy stood there, betrayed. How dare they! They were all against him and you couldn't trust anyone. His face was flushed with anger. The gun came out of his belt and he shook it at her as he yelled.

"This is supposed to be a guest room!"

**H**e'd often passed the abandoned gas station half blown away by the desert winds. He'd seen the lonely phone booth beside it, so close to old Route 52 that you could almost reach out and grab the receiver, and he'd often wondered if it worked.

It did. Thank God for Ma Bell.

Teddy sat in the only chair left in the ramshackle office, keeping a good distance from the windows just in case someone happened to glance over from the road.

Ethel was on the dusty floor, her hands tied in front, Teddy's only concession to comfort. Her feet were tied with strips from the same torn bedsheet and she was dressed in an old housecoat, the one she had hurriedly put on when the downstairs whistling lured her into the open.

Teddy wasn't good with the unexpected. He felt he couldn't just leave Ethel there. Even with her tied up, something might go wrong, he wasn't sure what. It was just so unexpected. His first instinct was to use her as a hostage although they were far from a hostage situation, and the kidnapping came a minute or so later as an extension of that idea.

Their first hour in the office was filled with talk. Ethel was

saying what anyone in her position would, and Teddy couldn't help feeling a little sorry. She reminded him of his mother, basically harmless and undoubtedly dowdy. She could even get the same irritating whine in her voice.

"My husband will do anything you want." She wriggled around, trying to find a comfortable position. "I don't suppose you'd consider letting me use that chair."

Teddy shook his head. It was all because of her they were in this mess. "You were supposed to be at that bazaar," he said accusingly.

"I never go out. I'm seeing a doctor about it."

He had noticed the sweat on her forehead but had written it off as natural stress. "Is this making you sick?"

"Those pills I took, they're helping."

"Why'd the paper say Mr. and Mrs. if you don't go?"

"They just say that. What business is it of yours?"

"Watch your mouth or I'll gag it." Teddy enjoyed that, like telling off his mother. "And what about bedrooms? You're supposed to be using the same one."

"Manny said that because it's none of their business. It's none of yours either. Sorry," she added, remembering.



"Something wrong between you? Maybe he won't be so anxious to pay."

"He'll pay. We've never been so in love. We just had to get separate rooms."

"Why?"

"None of your—I snore a little."

"You snore?"

"That's what Manny says. I can't hear myself."

"Papers never get things right, do they?" Teddy laughed, a throaty, dangerous laugh. "Pretty weird, huh? Fouled up by a snoring shut-in."

"This will work out just as well for you. Better." Her thin lips turned up in a quivering smile.

"I never kidnapped before. You know, this could've been avoided if your hubby had brains. A big place like that and no security."

"Manny doesn't like electronics."

"What about guards?"

"Manny keeps a gun under his mattress. He says it's all we need."

"I thought he was against guns."

"Oh, he is." She offered no further explanation. "We did have twenty-four-hour guards up until a year ago, but it seemed such a waste. One of us is almost always at home."

A few seconds later they

laughed. They began independently but at nearly the same instant, nervous but sincere laughter at the irony of Ethel's logic.

Both were content to let the evening end there. Let it end with a laugh and try to find the least painful position to wait and maybe sleep.

He telephoned early. His plan had been to wait until noon or so, make Green sweat, but Teddy himself had grown too anxious. Besides, at six A.M. there was less chance of someone driving by and being curious about a man in a phone booth in the middle of nowhere.

It rang just once. "Hello?" Teddy didn't answer. The voice at the other end was quick and tense. "Who is this?"

"Did you read the note we left?" He liked the "we." It gave a nice touch.

"How is she? Look, I can get the fifty thousand as soon as the bank opens. Can I talk to Ethel?"

"That's kind of impossible, Mr. Green, but she's okay, take my word."

"You're not going to kill her, are you?" There were little gaps in his speech and Teddy took it for granted that the police were listening in.

"Do your part and no one'll get hurt. We don't want the

cops messing this up. We know you went to them, it's only natural. But they'd better not be involved in the payoff or Ethel here gets it." So far, so good.

"Has she seen your face?"

"Faces," Teddy reminded him.

"If she knows what you look like, you'll probably kill her no matter what I do."

"No killing. We know what we're doing. I'll call again at nine thirty. You have the money. We'll know if the cops are involved." And he hung up quickly.

Teddy walked back to the office, mentally kicking himself. Even a pillowcase with eye-holes would have been some protection. Sure, she'd seen his face in the pantry but just for a second. If only he'd thought ahead before picking the bedroom lock—

Well, what's done's done and he wasn't about to kill. He'd gas up and be out of the state before Ethel could even sit down with an artist.

The roll of twenties would last until he found a town to get lost in. Maybe down to Mexico or up to Canada. In Mexico it'd be easy getting rid of the ransom. Cash it bit by bit with street changers and nobody could trace it.

Ethel had gotten what she wanted. She was finally in the chair, tied into it, with the chair

itself chained to a support beam. A handkerchief came out of Teddy's back pocket—it was clean enough—and went into her mouth.

"Your hubby's here in a couple hours. If you know what's good, you'll forget my face." That should make her think twice.

He paced around the office, wiping for prints and making sure nothing was left behind, then drove his pickup to the paved shoulder and stopped.

"Just in case there's some fancy way of tracing tires," he thought, racing back to the junked broom from the garage and using it to sweep away the tracks.

The next stop would be Mrs. Lopez. Wake her, pay her for the month, tell her you're going away for a few days, and throw your things in back.

**T**eddy had seen enough movies to know how you did ransom. You get numbers from pay phones all over town. You tell your client to dress in a T-shirt and jeans so he can't wear a mike. And then you have him drive from one phone to another, calling him at each and telling him where to go next.

The first call was at nine thirty, as promised. Green was to drive to a pay phone by the

old shopping center on the other side of town.

To Teddy's surprise nothing went wrong. It was even fun. He would place the calls from another booth, usually within a block of the one Green was using. You have to keep an eye on your pigeon.

He got a kick out of seeing the big man dressed like a slob and following orders. He almost wished this part could go on forever, being in control with no real risk. With each call Teddy gained a little confidence, got a little ruder. What could Green do, refuse to cooperate?

After sending him to five different phones, he felt it was time. He'd seen no suspicious street traffic, no hint of plainclothes. Twice he had tailed Green's car at close quarters, and if the man was in touch with the police it had to be by mental telepathy.

"You're doing good for a fat slob," he chortled into the receiver. "Next is Hanover and Fourth, northeast corner. And let's do it fast. You drive like an old lady."

"How much more of this?"

"Just a couple more. Oh, and park on Fifth. The walk'll do you good."

Teddy was already on Fifth when the balding man wearing a white undershirt pulled up across the street in his new

Mercedes. A passerby might have thought the man was just in a hurry, maybe doing errands from the look of him, but there were no passersby to see him lock up and walk quickly, almost jog, around the corner and out of sight.

Unlocking the Mercedes took less than five seconds. The briefcase was under the passenger seat, and a glance inside told him Green was playing straight. Teddy slipped the case under his arm and was about to go and make the final call when he decided to give the rest of the interior a quick check. Nothing else under the seats. No hidden mikes, just as he'd thought, not even a C.B. He took a look in the glove compartment just to make sure and found a small handgun hidden under a loose handkerchief.

"Old hypocrite. I ought to take it, just to show him." But a second later he reconsidered. "You don't want to be traced through someone else's gun. Besides, he's just looking out for his wife."

Teddy left it where it was, relocked the Mercedes and made the call. "Thanks for the dough. You can get her now." And he gave directions.

"You don't know how much I appreciate this."

Teddy laughed. "Anytime, Manny old boy, anytime."

It was early evening in San Diego when Teddy pulled off the freeway to eat. He bought an afternoon paper. He could afford to buy them now. Sitting at the counter he leafed through, just to see if he'd made the news this far south.

He almost missed it. He was expecting a small headline with the word "kidnapped" and at first didn't pay attention to the front page announcement of a murder. Putting down his burger, he read it several times.

Mrs. Emmanuel Green had been kidnapped last night when she interrupted a burglar at the Greens' suburban estate. This morning Mr. Green paid a ransom of fifty thousand dollars against the advice of the police. Mrs. Green's body was found an hour or so later, bound and gagged and with two bullet holes through the head. The murder weapon was at her side, a handgun belonging to her husband and one of the objects stolen in last night's burglary.

Teddy didn't finish his meal, but immediately got into his pickup and drove straight through to Mexico.

**M**anny was sitting in the greenhouse. "That's all for today, Marie. Get estimates on the security system and an-

swer the condolences. I don't want to see them, but keep a list."

"Yes, sir." There was pity in her voice. "The girls and I were talking. You should take a vacation, get away."

"I'd be too lonely."

He watched his secretary's young figure sway unselfconsciously as she drifted into the living room. In a few days he'd bring up the vacation idea and gently suggest she accompany him. He was as bubbly as a teenager planning his first romance, but he couldn't let it show.

Alone now, Manny allowed himself a smile. It was Ethel's agoraphobia that first planted the idea. As long as she was stuck at home, why not put her to use? It wasn't an extravagant plan when you thought about it. The renovation simply added to the resale value. And the Matisse over her bed would be just as good an investment as it had been a lure.

Of course it would have been cheaper if his thief had done the reasonable thing and left Ethel tied up at the house, but Manny didn't begrudge the money.

Maybe Mexico, he thought, gazing into the living room and watching Marie bend over to retrieve a fallen letter.

She'll like Mexico.

FICTION

# No Victim, No Crime

by Laura Lukon



*Illustration by Eric Marcus*

“When?” Jane demanded, her hands so tightly clenched together that her fingertips were flushed with blood.

“Sometime, baby.” A line appeared on Miles’s handsome brow, like a vandal’s scratch on a Roman bust. “I give you my word.”

“I’ve been hearing sometime for years now. I want to know *when*. I’m getting tired of playing house.” Tired, too, of battling the wrinkles, sagging flesh, and dull depression that seemed to hit her each time a season passed. But she couldn’t say that. “I want to wake up in the morning with you still next to me. I want to eat breakfast with you, like it was no big deal. I want to be able to call your office without pretending to be somebody else’s secretary.”

“Sweetheart, you know I want it as much as you do.”

“How long have you been saying that? And what have you done about it?”

“What do you think I should do about it?” He put his glass down—hard—on the wobbly, plastic parson’s table.

“Walk out,” she suggested recklessly.

“Oh, God, yes, walk out. How stupid can you be? Walk out on the money, too? Don’t tell me you wouldn’t mind *that*.”

Her head was turned away

from him, her voice dull and bitter. “Well, it’s clear *you* would.”

“We’re both too old to live on love. If I walked out on her—if I deserted her—Sid would make sure she cleaned me out. Don’t forget it was her money that got the business going.”

“You said she’s not a bad woman. Can’t you reason with her?”

“With her, maybe. But not with her brother. And he’s the one she listens to, not me.”

“Suppose *she* left you . . .”

“Don’t kid yourself. She’d never leave me.”

Jane stared bleakly around her cramped studio: at the vivid bedsheets that were supposed to look like whimsical hangings and only looked like limp laundry, at the imitation high-tech lampshades that had been obviously home-covered with freezer foil, at the rockhard daybed that disdained its disguise as a harem couch. “What do we do then? Just sit around and wait for her to die?”

“Maybe,” he said. “Maybe that’s just what we have to do.”

“You’ve got to listen to me,” Jane said. “Believe me. It was hard for me to come here.” Her hands were shaking so badly she had had to thrust them in the pockets of

her jacket. He hadn't taken her jacket and had only just, grudgingly, indicated she might take a seat on the sofa. He himself had sat heavily in a stiff, slat-backed chair facing her. Both were some distance away from and at right angles to the silent woman in the deep armchair.

Now the dark man was staring at her as if she had come to sell pornographic pictures. "All right. You said it's important. It better be. It wasn't easy for me to get away from my work."

"I have to explain . . ." For a moment, she didn't think she could go through with it. Go home, forget the whole thing. But then she took a breath and plunged ahead. ". . . explain who I am. You see, I'm . . . that is, Miles and I . . ."

"Yes," he said. "I could have guessed that. I knew Miles had something going on the side."

The small, anxious-looking woman in the distant chair moaned. She was fine-featured, pale, and as insubstantial as winter light. She didn't seem like a woman anyone—not even Jane—could hate.

"Be quiet, Nina," said the man. "You knew it, too. You've always known what Miles was like." He turned back to Jane. "So what do you want? As if I couldn't guess. You've come here for money to disappear from his life? Or you want Nina to do the

noble thing and give the scum a divorce so you and him can get your rocks off around the clock?"

Jane flinched. There was nothing to do but go on. "Neither." She was pleased to see him scowl as if he hadn't anticipated her denial. Her warming dislike of him made her brave. She spoke with calm deliberation. "I came to warn you."

His expression was guarded now, showing no interest. "Oh, yeah? That the guy's no good. Thanks, but we already know that. You're wasting your time, girlie."

"I probably am." She looked only at him. "But all the same, I came to tell you that there are other ways of getting rid of a wife besides divorcing her."

The woman in the chair squeaked, obviously not as dim as she appeared.

"Do you know what you're saying?" Suspicion put a hard edge on his words. "So what's in it for you? Why should you do us the big favor of coming over with this story? Maybe he's dumping *you*? Maybe this is your idea of revenge?"

Now Jane turned to the woman, who stared back at her with large, lusterless eyes. "I've stepped over the lines at times in my life, but I have my limits. I've got a conscience like anybody else. Take it or leave it."



"Okay." Sid was lighting himself a cigarette. The gesture seemed falsely casual. "So prove it. Give me details. How and when? What's the plan?"

"Oh, God," the woman said softly. "I just can't believe it. This is like a movie. This isn't life."

Jane looked at the man levelly. "There are no details. I don't even know if there *is* a plan. At least, he wasn't going to tell me. It could be this week. It could be a year from now. All I know is that he's determined to go through with it and to make it look like an accident."

"Oh, God. I knew he wasn't happy, but I never thought he hated me."

"Suppose I went to the police." He pointed his cigarette at her. "Would you tell them what you just told me?"

"Are you kidding? I'd deny every word of it." Jane shook her head. "Besides, they'd have to find me first. I'm getting out of here. Leaving this town. It's not smart to be involved with a man who thinks like that. Suppose he got tired of *me*. Sometimes you have to cut your losses."

She took her hands out of her pockets—they were not shaking now—and stood up.

"That's it, huh? You come to us with a cock-and-bull story like that and nothing to back

it up and expect me to swallow it."

She shrugged and moved toward the entry hall. "I thought I ought to tell you and I have."

"You give us nothing we can take to the police, so what do you want us to do about it?"

Jane paused, a few feet from the door. "That's your business. As far as I'm concerned, you can spend the rest of your life—and *hers*—just keeping an eye on him, trying to figure out how to keep it from happening, when you don't even know what it is or how it's going to happen. Do what you like. It's your funeral." As she went out, she heard the woman begin to whimper.

"Oh, Sid, do you think he could?"

Jane felt limp with dizziness and she buried her head in her arms on the steering wheel until the moment had passed. Then she sat up straight and, catching sight of herself in the rear view mirror, yanked off the hot, tight wig and threw it on the seat. Her heart was beating fast as if she had been running.

Well, it was over. She had told them. It was up to them now.

In a while she felt calm enough to drive. She turned on the ignition and eased slowly out of the parking lot into the

street as if she and the car were made of glass. Then she smiled. Let Miles call her stupid now.

There was always a chance it wouldn't work. Sid might confront Miles with her accusation, but what would Miles do? Just deny it, tell Sid he was crazy.

And if Miles turned on her, she herself would deny being the curly-haired brunette who had told such an improbable story to his brother-in-law—if, as she would point out, there was even such a person. It was even possible that the distrust and accusations would be enough to bring the already weak marriage to a crisis.

But she was counting on Sid's saying nothing. Miles had said the man always played his cards close to his chest. By now, if her plan had worked, Sid ought to be urging his sister to leave her obviously dangerous husband. What else was there to do, as Jane had given them nothing to use legally. They had no handle on Miles. Only their suspicions. What woman with money of her own would go on living with a man who wanted to kill her? No, Nina would take off for safety like a rabbit. So what if Miles had to part with some of the property; there'd still be enough left for them.

Jane smiled again as she idled at a light. And Miles need

never know how it had all come about. Talk about your perfect murder. All plot and no victim.

“Thank you, Miss Burch,” Miles said, nodding at the glass of water she had

discreetly set on the corner of his desk. “And hold my calls for the next ten minutes.”

When she had left the room, he took a small prescription bottle out of a drawer and shook a yellow tablet into his hand. He had a headache, too, but that would go away once his nerves relaxed. He swallowed the tablet and rested his chin on his fist.

He was getting too old for this stress. He remembered when he used to think that it was stimulating: the secret affairs, furtive hasty meetings, amorous lunch hours. Now it seemed just tiring. Too many demands from both of them, too much pleasing, too many lies. It was time to settle down to marriage. The problem was that he was already married, but to the wrong woman. He couldn't be happy with Nina's meek, colorless face reproaching him across the dinner table. He wanted Jane. She was lively, she knew how to have fun and how to talk to him. She could be demanding, too, but once she had what she wanted, mar-

riage, she'd have nothing to complain of.

He shook his head. But was getting free of Nina worth giving up everything he'd sweated to get in the last fifteen years? He knew Sid. Clever Sid would prove that Nina should get the house, the cars, the biggest share of the business, that Miles wasn't even entitled to a spare pair of undershorts. One fact kept coming back to him: he'd be better off with her dead. It was an ugly thought, but true. And sometimes ugly thoughts have to be thought and ugly things done. Nina wasn't a bad woman, but she wasn't a particularly good one, either. Her cramped, timid life wasn't worth much to the world and didn't even seem to be worth much to her. It was a hell of a thing to think, but he might as well face it, he'd been thinking it for years.

Miles raised his head and put his hands flat on the desk. Things happened to people sometimes. Accidents. Painless, of course. It would be easy

enough, since Nina had no real sense that there could be danger to her in the world. He wasn't aware he'd reached a decision, yet he found himself thinking practically: I must be careful not to say anything to Jane. She can be stupid sometimes; she could give it all away.

**T**he sobs made him nervous. They were small, snuffling sobs such as a child might make, and they had been going on for twenty minutes.

"For chrissake, Nina, that's enough."

She dabbed at her face with the tissue he'd thrust at her. "I'm scared. It's such a nightmare. I just can't *think*."

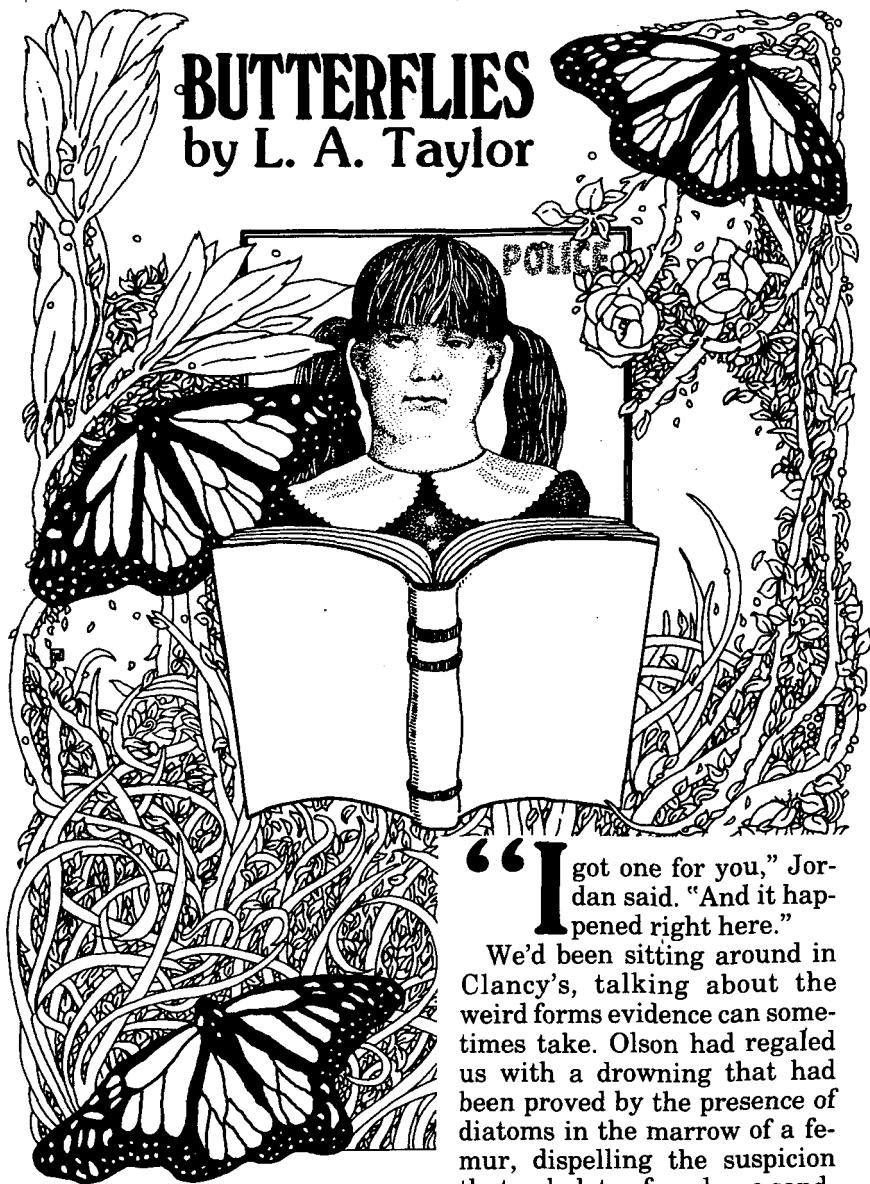
"You don't have to. I told you I'll take care of everything."

"Couldn't we just get a fast divorce? Like in Las Vegas?"

He shook his head solemnly and turned away so she wouldn't see his slight, satisfied smile. "We've been through that," he said. "*He* wasn't planning on divorcing *you*."

# BUTTERFLIES

by L. A. Taylor



**I** got one for you," Jordan said. "And it happened right here."

We'd been sitting around in Clancy's, talking about the weird forms evidence can sometimes take. Olson had regaled us with a drowning that had been proved by the presence of diatoms in the marrow of a femur, dispelling the suspicion that a skeleton found on a sand-

Illustration by Kurt Wallace

bank belonged to a man who had been shot and dumped. Ionelli had matched that with some story he'd heard about an arsonist's being caught because of goldfish scales on his pants, and somehow that had reminded Peterson of the George Ross case, a cop-killer caught because of his fingerprint on the officer's piece, which he'd flushed down a john. Naturally, the drain got stopped up, and when they got the gun out, there was the fingerprint *etched into* the barrel.

"Shows there's somebody looking out for us," Peterson said.

"Coulda looked a little sooner," Ionelli pointed out.

The talk had begun to wander after that, onto other cases. Jordan had been silent through all of this, and when he spoke, we all looked at him almost as if the wall had decided to enter the conversation.

"Only time I ever got injured in the line of duty. It was the year the butterflies came through town."

If you were here for that, you remember it. Monarch butterflies, bright orange netted black like Tiffany glass, on their way to Mexico by the millions, for one whole week. Just standing and watching them go by at eye level, like a man naturally does, you knew the sight was one

that would never leave you—hundreds, fluttering this way and that, tending south without ever heading south, stopping off to sample the early chrysanthemums from time to time. Then you might ask yourself if they rested in trees, and look up. At tree level, at roof level, so high in the air they were nearly invisible black dots, hundreds of thousands of butterflies deserting the north for a winter vacation, and who could blame them?

Not without casualties. The ground wasn't exactly littered with, certainly not thick with, corpses, but every direction you looked, at least one butterfly lay broken, still fluttering, but only in the wind. You'd see them stuck to the headlights of cars, bits of orange showing at the edges of tires, tiny orange banners on windshields; the day it rained, it also rained butterflies.

"The woman had been dead maybe two hours when we were called in," Jordan said. "You have to realize, this wasn't your ordinary city block. This was near one of the lakes, those big houses up on the hill with the long, wide driveways, junipers all the way down. Naturally, we went door-knocking after a bit, and just as naturally, we came up with zip."

Jordan took a sip of his beer:

a chancy business; we've all had investigations that came up with zip, and who wants to be reminded? Down at the other end of the table, I heard Olson start another conversation.

"Well, we had the mobile crime unit in there, you know the drill, and naturally every kid in the neighborhood was standing around the end of that drive waiting to see something. So I went down to get rid of them. 'Kids,' I said, 'unless you saw something funny going on here, git. Otherwise you could find yourself arrested.' Well, they all scattered but one, a little fat blonde girl who just stood there and stared at me.

"'What, did you see something?' I asked her, joking, you know, to get her moving.

"'Uh-huh,' she says, real quiet.

"'What did you see?'

"'The car.'

"One of those kids you have to pull every word out like a tooth, know what I mean? So okay, 'What car?' I asked.

"'That came after the lady screamed.'

"'Came where?'

"'Down.' She pointed up the driveway.

"'Where were you?'

"The girl, she's maybe eight years old, pointed to the junipers. Big old bushes they were, with a lot of dead branches in

the middle cleared out by one of those picky type gardeners they've got for those big houses, so it's just like a tunnel running up the hill by the drive. And raked underneath, so help me. And under the bush at the end of the drive there's a piece of newspaper and a doll.

"'That your doll?'

"'Uh-huh.'

"'You playing there when the car came down?'

"'Uh-huh.'

"Well, I didn't want to get myself in trouble with leading questions, you know, so I called up to the house and got Sam Rexford to come down and help me talk to the kid before I went any further. Sam came down, and we sat on the wall, there's a stone wall beside the drive, and he said to the kid, 'Tell me about the car.'

"'It was green.'

"'Big help, I thought.'

"'Anything else?'

"'It had butterflies stuck to it. Three of them.'

"'Progress, I thought. She'd volunteered a fact.'

"'Look,' I said. 'How about you take me, show me where you live, and I can talk to your mom, okay?'

"'I'm not supposed to go with strangers.'

"Wonderful, I thought. 'I'm not a stranger, I'm a police officer. And I'm taking you home.'

"So the kid eyes me up and down. She's got these greeny-brown eyes that look like they can see right through you, and a smear of something on the end of her nose, and a little crust of maybe chocolate around her mouth. 'You're a strange policeman,' she says, like she's stating a fact.

"Sam Rexford starts to laugh.

"'And so are you,' says the kid. Not fresh, another fact.

"'Look,' Sam says. He shows her his badge and his I.D. card and I can see they cut no ice. 'We really are both policemen, and we'd like to hear more about this car you saw, it could be important. But we'd like to talk to you with your mom or dad there, so could you show us where you live?'

"The kid thought it over. 'At school they told us if somebody wanted to know where we lived, we shouldn't tell them,' she says. 'A *policeman* told us that. Officer Cassill.'

"'Cassill?' I asked Sam, over her head.

"'Community relations. Bike safety, so on.'

"'I got it,' I said. 'What if you go home, and get your mom, and bring her back?'

"'You could follow me,' the kid says. 'I think I better not. Can I have my doll, please?'

"Well, I don't know how long we'd have been stymied there,

but after a while the kid's mother comes along to see where she is, ready to give her a little hell for not being home on time and drag her away.

"'She could have some important information for us,' I said to the mother. You don't use the word 'witness' with mothers, they think of the defense attorney badgering their poor darling up on the witness stand, and have fits."

Jordan sipped at his beer again. Even Olson waited for him to put it down.

"Well, to make a long story short, we got the pair of them over to the precinct house, and one of the stenos and I sat down with the kid and her mother to talk about the car.

"She didn't know what kind of car it was. She didn't even know if it had two doors or four, or if a man or a woman had been driving, that's how much she'd noticed. All she'd really seen was the color, and the 'poor butterflies' stuck to the grille.

"I looked at the steno, and the steno looked at me. It was a long shot, I admit—I figured the guy had had it through a car wash hours ago. But I asked. I showed the kid a picture of a car grille and I said to her, 'You show me right where the butterflies were stuck, okay?'

"She shook her head.

"'Come on, Sarah,' the mother



says, sweet as honey. 'Show the nice policeman where the butterflies were.'

"I can't," the kid says.

"I figured she didn't remember, something like that.

"Why, baby?" the mother asks.

"That's not what the front of that car looked like.'

"Well, I wasn't sure I heard right. After all, an eight-year-old girl! 'What do you mean, that's not what the front of the car looked like?'

"It didn't have this, and this, and it had its name here, and the shiny part wasn't that shape, and—'

"O-kay," I said. 'I gotcha.' I had the steno bring in the book with the pictures of front ends, and I said, 'Okay, kid, show me the butterflies.'

"Like I say, she was maybe eight years old. She turned over those pages one by one, real slow, and the mother and the steno trading glances all the time, and the mother and me looking at each other frustrated—I guess she wanted to get back to her soaps, and I sure as hell could have been doing other things—until finally the kid gets to a page of Pontiacs. 'Give me a pencil,' she says.

"So I gave her a pencil out of my breast pocket, and real careful and slow she draws three butterflies on the picture of the

grille of a 1979 Bonneville.

"Well," Jordan said, looking around the table, "I don't have to tell you guys about nitty-gritty police work. With the model and color of the car, it didn't take much to track one down pretty close to the case: it belonged to a guy this woman hired to take care of her yard, same guy as swept out that little cave nice as you please for a little girl to play in. And that's when the fun began."

"What, you had him, right?" Ionelli said.

Jordan snorted. "Not that one. Claimed he'd been out of town ten days, hadn't been near the lady's house, musta been the sub he got for her did the raking. Maybe the murder, too."

"Only he couldn't remember who he asked," Ionelli sighed.

"Right."

"So what's the problem?" Peterson asked. "You get a warrant and go look at the car—"

Jordan shook his head. "We tried. But the judge—you remember old Hendricks—refused. He didn't think any more about the reliability of eight-year-old girls than I had, before this one taught me different. Said there wasn't sufficient grounds for suspicion to grant a warrant. So there we were, Sam and me, we'd alerted our suspect and we didn't have a thing to hold him on, except

those butterflies. And worse, he had a sort of an alibi, a friend who'd taken him over to the Amtrak depot ten days before and had gone back to pick him up just that afternoon, the day after the stabbing. Did I say she'd been raped? Well, anyway, the suitcase was standing in the middle of the floor of the guy's room and the friend was still sitting there with a can of Bud in his hand.

"So forget it, cop," the guy said. His name was Kenny, big guy with one of those plaid flannel shirts and hiking boots. He rocks up on his toes and down on his heels and gives me a grin. 'Go bug somebody else.'

"You got somebody to swear you spent that whole ten days on the North Shore?" I asked.

"Hell, no," Kenny said. 'I backpacked up the shore and went fishing, and I'd like to see you prove I didn't.' So, I tipped my hat, so to speak, and Sam and I went back down the stairs.

"You know, and I know, that's our guy," I said to Sam. 'But I got a horrible feeling we'll never be able to prove it.'

"Maybe we can hook him on physical evidence?"

"Not without a warrant," I pointed out. 'We'll need a little more for that, and we won't get it without we get the warrant.'

"Round and round," Sam said. 'Maybe we could at least get a

look at the car through a garage window, or something, show us we're on the right track.'

"We can but try," I agreed, and we went around the back of the building—one of those three story bricks, cheap but garages underneath, over on Emerson. And the garage doors had windows in 'em, and in the one this guy's name was on, there was the Bonneville.

"Sam tried the door. 'Locked.' He kicked it a couple of times but it didn't say *sorry sir!* and raise right up, so he kicked it again.

"I looked in the window again. Damn car sitting right there, ass end at us, no way we could see any butterflies on the grille. And dirty as hell.

"At least he ain't had it through a car wash," Sam said.

"What good does that do us?" I groused. We were walking back up the alley when it hit me.

"Butterflies! God damn it, Sam, staring me right in the face!" I said. 'You run up and get my car, get it down here and block that garage door while I stay here and head him off if I have to!'

"What the—what will that do for us?" Sam stared at the keys I'd slapped into his hand.

"The butterflies, Sam, the butterflies! They didn't start coming through town until last

weekend, remember? If he left that car in the garage for ten days, no way he'd have collected three butterflies on that grille! Get the car, call us a backup, and we'll go get him to make that statement over again and sign it. That'll get us our warrant!"

"Sam was running before I finished what I was saying. We got the garage blocked, and called a backup car, and we went back and we got the two of those guys separated and got 'em to swear to everything they'd just told us, got it down on tape and even remembered to give our pal Kenny the warning. Jeez, beautiful."

"I don't get it," Peterson said.

"He couldn't have it both ways, you dumb Swede," Ionelli explained. "How was he gonna explain the bugs on his car when he hadn't had it out? And nothing to say he hadn't come back to town sometime in those ten days, right?"

"Oh, yeah," Peterson said, with the light of discovery.

"They found those butterflies, too, right where the kid said they'd be," Jordan reminisced. "Our Kenny tried to make a break when he got it figured out—that's where I got this"—Jordan pushed up his sleeve to show a long white scar

along his forearm—"but we nailed him good. Found his fingerprints inside the drawer handle where the knives were kept in that woman's kitchen, found threads of her carpet caught in the heel of his shoe, matched his skin to what was under her fingernails—big scratch on his arm, just where that bullet gave me my own. You know the drill. Once you know where to look, you can find what you need."

Jordan drained his beer and put the glass down, shaking his head. "I always thought that one took the cake, a guy getting life on the strength of three dead butterflies. I still got that page out of the book—we never even needed to call the kid to testify."

"Good for you," said Olson. "Now, how about you buy the next round?"

"Hey, now you're talking," Peterson said.

"Wait a minute," Ionelli said. "If you took the guy to the station, didn't you pat him down?"

"Sure," Jordan said. "You think I'm stupid?"

"Then how'd he shoot you?"

"Oh, that wasn't him," Jordan said comfortably, nodding to the waiter. "That was Sam. He got a little excited—don't we all?"

# The California Killer

[illegible]

I was in the Biology Building the next day, preparing to teach

"Yes. The symptoms appear

exclusively in children. Until now."

She left it hanging so I said, "Tony."

That was the beginning. Dr. Kirsten is a thin, birdlike woman with a sharp eye for the stray fact. She can find the cause of death when all the experts have given up. She has a mind that understands facts and people. I suppose she has a method, but she's never explained it to me. All I know is that she always asks me questions.

"Erica, why was the virus fatal?"

I gave it my best guess. "First possibility. Tony was in a weakened state, just recovering from a bout with hepatitis.

"Second possibility. The virus had gone through a series of mutations making it more virulent.

"Third possibility. Tony didn't die of California encephalitis because it is perfectly harmless and there are no mosquitoes in Iowa in January."

She drew her lips into a familiar pucker and pushed an index finger into her cheek. "Precisely."

I started to suggest alternatives, but she held up her hand.

"Only he did die of the virus. After death, Tony's brain matter caused the disease in laboratory mice. That's conclusive.

Tony Barberra died of a virus that has never been fatal, in a place where he could not have been naturally infected by a mosquito."

She didn't ask any more questions. She didn't have to. I was asking them all myself.

I tried to remember what happened the day before, when Tony collapsed. Dr. Kirsten and I were standing in line at the Student Union cafeteria. It was early, about eleven thirty. There were only three of us in line, Dr. Kirsten, myself, and Professor Albright.

Professor Albright held up the rest of us to complain to Maggie, one of the student helpers, about the quality of the food. This was a lunchtime ritual. Whenever Albright ate at the cafeteria, he made a point of complaining loudly. His object was to get Tony to come out and start a yelling match. Maggie gave her usual response to Albright. She rolled her eyes and waited for him to shut up.

Behind the counter Chris Eisenberg was joking with his girlfriend, Kate O'Donnell. I know Chris pretty well. He's a graduate student getting his doctorate in microbiology. He works hard, and he's dedicated. His girlfriend Kate is all surface, as far as I can tell. The two are often together during Kate's shift at the cafeteria.

Tony, directing things in the kitchen, must have heard Albright's voice from there because he stormed into the cafeteria right in the middle of a complaint about the peas. His thin figure rushed by Kate and Chris. Ever since his bout with hepatitis, Tony had looked emaciated and pale. That day his cheeks were red, but I figured he was angry at Albright. The two fought constantly. Tony walked up to Maggie, who was by the steam table. He raised a finger as if to point at Albright's face. Then he collapsed into convulsions. His face fell into the mashed potatoes and his flailing arms filled the cafeteria with a loud, clanging sound. For ten seconds, no one moved.

Then Dr. Kirsten broke out of her trance and scrambled over the counter. She pulled Tony off the vegetable bins and held his tongue down. "Call 911," she said to Kate.

Kate fainted.

Fine, I thought. But I couldn't move.

It was Chris who finally pulled himself from the wall and ran for the phones. That released everyone. Maggie and I went to Kate. Professor Albright dispersed a small crowd that had started to gather in the dining room.

The convulsions stopped, and

Tony went into a coma. An ambulance arrived and drove him to University Hospital where he died that afternoon. That would have been the end of it if Dr. Kirsten hadn't been there. People would have said, "Well, it's odd, but it happens." Meaning not that people die often of a mosquito-borne virus in winter, but that senseless tragedy is not unusual, it happens. Dr. Kirsten didn't think senseless tragedies were unusual either, but she thought all tragedies should have an explanation. That's why she went to the police.

**T**he local police chief is a heavy man with slick, black hair and a booming voice; he goes by the name of Amarillo Jones.

"Kirsty," he used a nickname of his own making, "what the heck is this California insulinitis stuff? I never heard of it, much less of anybody's biting the dust from it." Occasionally, Amarillo Jones talks like he's from Dodge City.

"No one died from it until now, Amarillo. At least no adult died. Tony Barberra was infected by a much more virulent strain than has previously existed. If he was accidentally exposed to the virus, we must find its source for public safety. If, on the other hand, he was ex-

posed to the virus with malicious intent . . .”

“You’re saying you think this is murder. You think Barberra was exposed to the insulinitis . . .”

“Encephalitis.”

“ . . . whatever you call it, on purpose. Who would do a thing like that?”

“Tony was not well liked. He managed the cafeteria successfully, but he bullied his employees. He was something of a Don Juan as I understand it. People may have been jealous.”

“Then there are about two hundred suspects.”

“Four.”

“Four hundred? What in hell are you trying to say?”

“I mean there are only four suspects. The four people who were in the cafeteria when he collapsed, excluding Erica and myself, of course.”

Amarillo was more skeptical than I. He couldn’t get used to the fact that Dr. Kirsten never speculated or threw out wild ideas. I don’t think he really thought of her as a scientist. I think he had more than a passing interest in her as a woman. And women couldn’t be smarter than Amarillo.

I had a question for her.

“You say the killer was in the cafeteria. How could anyone know when Tony would collapse? The virus action varies

so much from person to person that no one could exactly predict the time Tony would enter convulsions. It’s just coincidence that he collapsed while those four people were there.”

“The collapse was coincidence, but the killer was there and had a scientific interest in how Tony died.”

“How do you know?” I beat Amarillo to the next question.

“I heard something. There was a voice, a very quiet voice. I heard it when I climbed over the counter. The voice said, ‘Incubation period, forty-eight hours.’ I’m quite certain I didn’t imagine it.”

Amarillo Jones listened to that.

**T**he temperature was twelve below. It hadn’t hit zero since the day Tony died. Amarillo didn’t want to leave his office, but Dr. Kirsten insisted.

We were the only people on the street for the first couple of blocks. Nobody would have recognized us if they’d passed. We wore puffy down coats, thick hats, and wool scarves wrapped around our faces. During the seven minute walk to the Biology Building we were anonymous.

Dr. Kirsten started to speak before the door to her office shut.



"It is not difficult for a talented student to create a mutant strain of virus." She drew a book from the shelf and opened it to diagrams on viral growth. "This explains the spontaneous mutation of viruses."

Amarillo glanced at the diagrams. "Kirsty, I can't understand all this complicated stuff. Put it in plain English."

Dr. Kirsten sighed. "First, cells in a tissue culture are inoculated with a virus. The virus is allowed to grow and reproduce. Eventually, among all the cultures, mutant virus strains will be detected. The strain resistant to certain antibodies is preserved."

"This mutant strain is then used to inoculate cells in a new tissue culture. Other mutations develop. The virologist watches closely for more and more resistant strains of the virus; he isolates these strains and reproduces them. Theoretically, it is possible to produce a virus so deadly that nothing can destroy it."

She canted her head at Amarillo. He coughed and picked up the book on her desk. Beyond, through the tightly sealed windows, I saw a lone, bundled figure walking in the snow.

Dr. Kirsten spoke again. "Someone created a mutant and deadly strain of California en-

cephalitis. That person knows virology well."

Amarillo had a response ready. "If you'll pardon my saying so, you and Erica fit that description."

We did, but so did Chris. I knew he was working on viral strains for his Ph.D. thesis. But I didn't say anything. I liked Chris. I went out with him a couple of years ago. We got along well. We discussed science most of the time. I figured Chris understood the balance between scientific dedication and human compassion. There was only one incident that made me doubt it. Chris and I were discussing the necessity of using laboratory animals in some scientific experiments. Chris described an experiment he did in college in which he injected a stray dog he named Hamlet with rabies. His clinical description of the symptoms and death of Hamlet turned the fluid in my spine to ice. But I didn't think Chris would commit murder. I wanted Dr. Kirsten to throw her suspicions on someone else.

She didn't. "Two of the student workers don't qualify: Maggie Malone is in journalism and Kate O'Donnell is in psychology. We all know Professor Albright teaches history. That leaves Chris Eisenberg."

Dr. Kirsten wanted to visit

Chris's lab right then, but Amarillo wouldn't listen to her. He hated to be upstaged.

"This Eisenberg may know about viruses, but so do you two, like I said. We discounted you because you don't appear to have a motive. Well, neither does Eisenberg. Albright does have a motive, we all know that."

"What is it?" Dr. Kirsten thought she had him.

Amarillo wouldn't be pressured. He knew the university rumors as well as we did. "Albright hated Tony. I don't know why, but I'm going to find out why." I left them glaring at each other and went to get some work done.

**I** was in my office reading papers when Dr. Kirsten barged in, wearing a fur hat and tattered brown coat. Something besides the weather was bothering her.

"You went out with Chris Eisenberg?"

"Last year."

"He's researching encephalitis virus for his thesis."

I didn't respond.

"Do you think a young man like Chris would commit murder? Is he passionate by nature?"

"Quite the opposite. Chris seems mostly concerned about his work. When he talks about

his experiments he is intense. About feelings he is very cool and analytical."

"What are his outside interests?"

"He has none, as far as I can tell. His passion is science."

"Outside friends?"

"There's Kate, of course . . ."

"Yes."

There was Kate. Chris started seeing Kate after he stopped seeing me. She's all right, but she doesn't care about science at all. I told myself she fed other, more personal, interests. But it didn't make sense. When I saw the two of them together, Chris looked at Kate like she was part of the furniture; necessary, but uninteresting. Chris loomed for a moment like the stereotype of a mad scientist, sacrificing human compassion for the scientific ideal. I shook off the image and changed the subject.

"Where are we going?"

"Up the hill."

Up the hill is the edge of campus, where student housing begins. We trudged in silence. The time-and-temperature sign at the top of the hill said minus ten. We were going to visit Maggie Malone.

Maggie lived in an old Victorian house converted into a rooming house. All the windows were covered with plastic that sealed in the hot, stale air.

A midwestern winter exaggerates isolation. Days go by and the only people you see outdoors are bundles of wool without faces. Indoors, the rooms grow smaller every day and the people you live and work with take up more and more space. There is quiet, but no calm. Everyone is waiting; waiting for the end.

I thought that while we waited for Maggie's landlady to answer the door. She took a long time, and when she saw us all she said was, "I don't like to let in the cold."

Maggie is plump and not necessarily pleasingly, but she's neat, you can see that by the way she keeps her room. Nothing is out of place and even the textbook she was reading when we arrived was placed neatly on the corner of her desk.

Dr. Kirsten said she was trying to find the cause of the disease that killed Tony. Maggie nodded and smoothed out imaginary wrinkles on her bedspread. Dr. Kirsten asked Maggie if she would recount the events in the cafeteria that day.

"I was serving, like every day, and I had the bad luck to wait on Professor Albright, who always complains. The man is neurotic. If he doesn't like the food, why doesn't he go somewhere else? Then I heard Tony behind me—I know that walk

like I know my own heart-beat . . . or knew it . . ."

She went on, with less enthusiasm. "Tony came out and I thought he'd get in a yelling match with Albright again, but instead he just fell into the mashed potatoes." She stopped and fingered the wool on her sweater. "It's kind of a terrible way to end. I mean, I didn't like Tony, he was hard to work for, but I hated to see all that mess."

Dr. Kirsten nodded in sympathy. "What do you remember after Tony fell?"

"He was convulsing and I racked my brain, trying to remember how to deal with convulsions, and everything was so quiet except for Tony clanging on those stainless lids. Then you climbed over to help him. Professor Albright stood right behind you. I remember thinking, 'What does the professor know about convulsions?' We were all just shocked and couldn't think what to do. Then Kate fainted." Maggie looked disgusted.

"Kate was shocked, too, I suppose," Dr. Kirsten remarked.

"Sure. But Kate's a weakling. The kind all men go for. Who knows why? What good's a woman who faints in the middle of an emergency?"

I snagged on that. "Do you think she's Chris's type?"

"Oh, she's everybody's type.

Tony was wild for her, put his arm around her all the time. At least once a day he pulled her into the back room for a private conference. He'd always ask Chris when he was planning to give up Kate. Chris just shrugged. Tony said he'd be waiting in line. It didn't make any sense. Kate's a terrible worker. She doesn't keep the bins full, and when she does clean up, she leaves crumbs and little water droplets all over everything. I leave everything perfect. But Tony never noticed me, only Kate."

I was surprised by her jealousy. I couldn't imagine her neat, plump form involved in a messy love affair.

"How did Chris feel about Tony?" Dr. Kirsten asked her.

"Chris pretended to be cool and uninvolved, just let Tony paw her."

I spoke up. "Chris doesn't seem the sort to harbor secret resentments. He's even-tempered."

"Everybody has their passions," she commented.

Yes, I thought, and Chris's is science.

Later that afternoon, Dr. Kirsten sat on the edge of a chair in the police chief's office with her index finger buried in her cheek and her lips so puckered I thought she

might choke. Amarillo was quarreling with her, and from where I sat, it looked like he was winning.

"I asked around about how the Professor and Mrs. Albright are getting along."

"And they're not." Dr. Kirsten had heard this.

"No, they're not. One of the neighbor ladies—the one across the street—says she knows exactly why they're not getting along. One evening she couldn't sleep . . ."

"Couldn't keep to herself, you mean."

" . . . and she saw Mrs. Albright come home with another man. They stayed out in the car for quite some time; then they got out and the man walked her to the door with his arm around her. Now, who do you suppose the man was?"

"Tony Barberra." I answered because Dr. Kirsten was up pacing the room and clawing her hair.

"Not Albright," she got out, but Amarillo was on his feet, delighted with his success.

"The boy who shovels the walk overheard an angry argument between the two. Professor Albright referred to 'that Italian' several times and asked, 'Why are you letting him do this to you?'"

"Not Albright," Dr. Kirsten insisted again, and stopped her

pacing. "He has no access to the virus, no knowledge of the virus action."

Amarillo was ready for that. "Chris and Professor Albright were friends." He declared it loudly.

Dr. Kirsten shook her head violently, but before she could speak, he said, "It's true. Kate O'Donnell informed me that Chris took a history class from Albright and Albright expressed an interest in his viral research. He visited Chris's lab several times."

Professor Albright was a friend of Dr. Kirsten's. They were once lovers, but that was years ago. It still affected her, though, because when Amarillo finished, her lips weren't puckered any more and her index finger slid listlessly down her cheek.

We were drinking a cup of coffee at Joe's Place the next day when Dr. Kirsten admitted how much Amarillo's accusations bothered her. We got re-fills and she spoke quietly.

"I have to talk to this Kate myself. Albright hated Tony, but he doesn't have the starch of a killer. He's a talker, not a doer. He's too indirect, too passive. He prefers to complain and work on guilt."

"Introducing a virus into the bloodstream is pretty indirect."

"Not indirect enough for Al-

bright. He's the sort to fall asleep at night wishing you'd walk in front of a truck. Whispering the words 'incubation period, forty-eight hours' requires an active, almost perverse interest in how the victim died. That's not Albright."

We went to visit Kate. She lived in a newly-built brick complex on Iowa Avenue, on the third floor. The apartment was neat enough with a few books thrown around, a dirty coffee cup on the table, and a jacket over the easy chair. Kate brushed her honey brown hair and smiled at us while she spoke.

"I didn't tell Chief Jones that Professor Albright was a killer"—she had immediately sensed the meaning behind Dr. Kirsten's questions—"I just told him Albright was interested in Chris's work."

"Were you interested in Chris's work?"

"No. I didn't understand much of it, although Chris has a way of talking about his work that is very exciting. That's how he got the professor interested."

"What did you think of Tony, Kate?"

"Oh, he was all right. He wasn't that easy to work for, but I just ignored him."

"Maggie says he was interested in asking you out."

"Yeah. He bugged me about

it once or twice. He was a real ladies' man. Maggie thinks I encouraged him, but she was just jealous."

"How did Chris react to Tony's advances?"

"He didn't react. Chris was nice to Tony. He even treated an injury for him last week."

"An injury?"

"Yes. It was just a small cut Tony got carrying out a bag of garbage. Chris was around and took care of it. He said it was dangerous for a man recovering from hepatitis to get cut. I was glad to see the two of them getting along instead of having some male ego clash."

We thanked Kate and left. I had admired Chris Eisenberg's dedication to his work, I had even envied it. Yet he had carried dedication too far. First Hamlet was the subject of an experiment and now Tony. I didn't feel any warmer even though the time-and-temperature sign registered a balmy minus six.

**A**marillo Jones gave up on Albright when he heard about the cut. Dr. Kirsten also reminded him that Kate was a pretty girl, the kind anybody might get possessive about, so we headed for Chris's lab. The temperature was still up and the wind was gone. People took off their

scarves and for the first time since Tony's death, I could see faces in the street.

Inside his lab, Chris sat quietly by a table and listened to Amarillo tell him the facts.

"Now, boy," he finished, "you're the one that's got these insulinitis viruses and you're the one that had an opportunity to get them into Tony."

Chris stirred. "How did I get them into his system?"

"Through that wound on his hand, boy. A couple of people saw you help him out with that. Another thing. Somebody in the cafeteria said, 'Incubation period, forty-eight hours,' and I'm just betting that someone was you."

Now Chris moved. He walked slowly to look out the lab window. He laid one hand flat on the cold glass and for several seconds he said nothing. He took his hand away before he spoke. "I'm guilty."

**T**he next day was Saturday and I stayed inside drinking tea. Chris kept creeping into my thoughts. He was practicing the pure pursuit of science. There was something wrong with that. He must have been hiding his emotions in his work. Then one day they leaked out. His love for Kate and jealousy of Tony got to be too much and

all his quiet dedication turned into enough passion to make him use his science to kill.

I had that all figured out when Dr. Kirsten rang the bell. Mine was a fine, noble theory, but it turned out to be wrong. She stood on my doorstep, lips puckered and a gloved finger on her cold cheek.

"Obvious, it was obvious."

"What was obvious?"

"Come with me."

We walked towards the campus. I had forgotten my scarf and the wind felt like tiny ice cubes on my neck.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Chris's lab." She was walking ahead of me.

I tried to catch up and yelled, "He won't be there."

"Yes, yes. He's there. I made Amarillo let him go. So obvious."

I caught up with her then. "What was obvious?"

She stopped. My face went numb in the cold. She talked fast.

"We said Tony was a Don Juan, a ladies' man. But did anyone actually see him on a date?"

"There was the neighbor . . ."

"No. Tony was giving Mrs. Albright a ride home from a university function that night. I asked her about it. She and the professor had fought, and

Tony took advantage of the situation. Mrs. Albright cried on his shoulder, then got rid of him when she realized he was trying to push things. No one actually saw Tony out with women, they saw Tony flirting with women. He did not seduce women, he ogled them, he fondled them. And who, Erica, who stands to be hurt the most by such a man? Not the husbands, not the boyfriends . . ."

"The women."

"Precisely. She was sick of his constant attention, sick of the rumors about them, and sick of the fact that no one could defend her. So she defended herself."

We went on to Chris's lab. He started talking before we got in the door.

"Are you here to arrest me again?"

Dr. Kirsten laughed. "The two of us? No. No." She paused. "I came to ask why you were willing to take the rap for her."

"For Kate?" he asked.

Dr. Kirsten nodded.

Chris looked solemnly at the notes on his desk. "My thesis defense is today. If I were in custody, I would miss it, miss the thing I've been working towards for eight years."

"You were willing to give that up for Kate?"

"I didn't do it for her. I did it because I told Kate about the



virus and put the weapon in her hand."

Dr. Kirsten was puzzled. "I don't understand."

"Kate knew nothing about science. She was a companion, not a colleague like Erica." He glanced at me. I pulled my coat closer against a chill in the lab.

"A month ago she suddenly got interested in my viruses. I was pleased by her interest and explained to her about the mutation process. For weeks afterwards, she asked me about the incubation period in humans. I kept telling her it depended on the virus and the individual. She wanted me to be more exact. Then she asked specifically about the California encephalitis and its effect on a weakened person. I said the best prediction I could make would be from forty-eight hours to four days. Since no one had ever been infected by the virus, there was no way to know. She wasn't satisfied, but she quit asking.

"Yesterday, when you came in to talk to me, I knew it was Kate. She had complained about Tony several times, suggesting I tell him to leave her alone. I didn't see why I should bother him.

"What Chief Jones said about the injury I treated and those words about the incubation pe-

riod gave her away. You see, Kate lied about my treating the wound. It was just a scratch and I was going to tell Tony to use some alcohol and forget it, but Kate insisted it was bad for someone so weak. I took Tony back to the office and Kate brought in a first aid kit. Tony put his arm around her and whispered in her ear. It seemed appropriate for me to leave, so I went back to work. I don't know why she did it, but Kate was the only one who could have introduced the virus into his system. Those words about the incubation period were the answer to the question she'd been asking me for weeks."

Dr. Kirsten's voice was kind. "Chris, she'll be in a lot of trouble now. You won't be able to see her much. Don't let that stop your work."

Chris gathered his papers. "Oh, no. After my thesis I won't have time anyway."

Outside, Dr. Kirsten and I stopped again, but this time we didn't talk. We were watching Chris walk without a hat or scarf, his head bent forward and pointed towards his destination.

Both of us went home then and it was only later we heard that that Saturday was the coldest day of the year.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

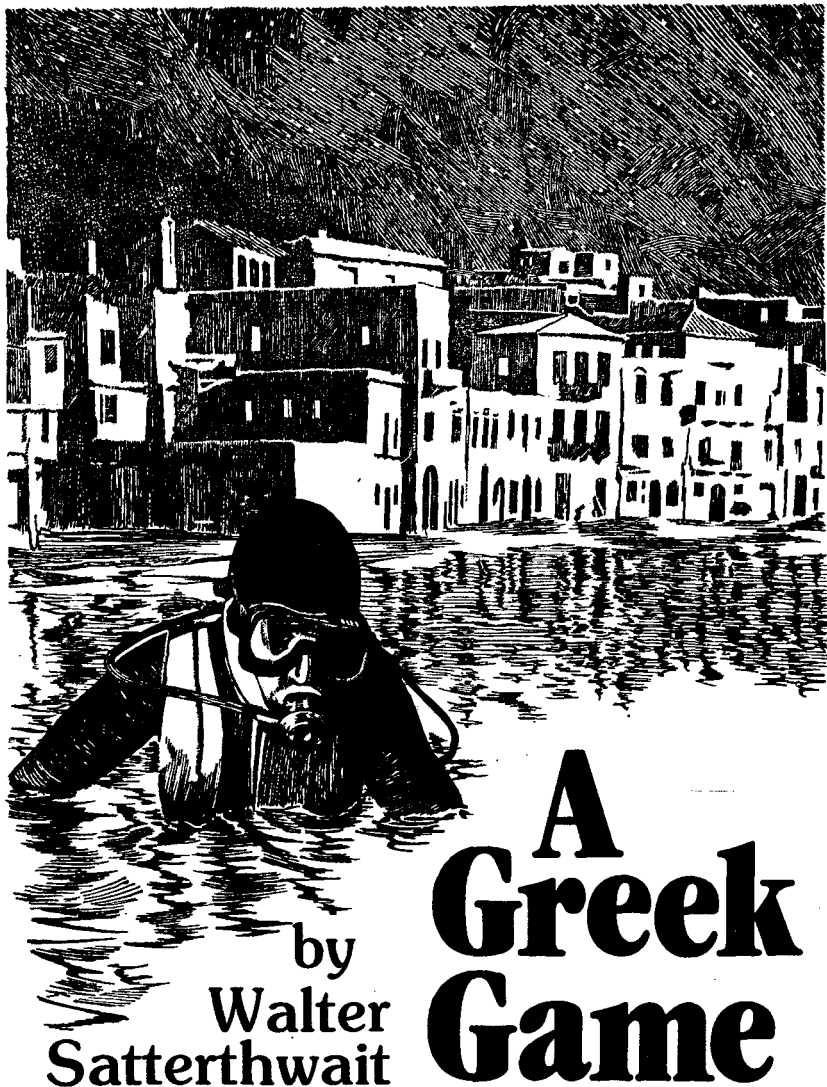


Arthur Tress

Sometimes the strangest things pop up. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the Mid-December Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 150.

FICTION



by  
Walter  
Satterthwait

# A Greek Game

*Illustration by Nick Jainschigg*

**T**oday, as he climbed up the steep sun-splashed dirt road to the house hidden in the grove of fig trees, the wind was so strong that he could almost lean against it, like a wall. Grey clumps of thyme shuddered in the fields; ripples of silver raced through the green of the gnarled wild olive on the ridge. With his canvas duffel bag slung over his left shoulder, his speargun in his right hand, he pressed himself against the swell of air, thrust himself through it, digging his sandals, muscles clenching, into the dusty white gravel skittering beneath.

Today's spearfishing had hardly been worth this effort. Or any other effort, for that matter.

He was, he realized, still annoyed. For the first time in two weeks he had been offered a shot at a fish, and he had blown it. He had flippered out to the big rock that stood alone seventy yards from the shingle beach, sucked a deep breath in through the snorkle, and dived, planning to circle its broad base at bottom level, forty feet from the surface.

He was running out of air, ribs beginning to clutch at his lungs, when, skimming above the sand, he rounded a spur of rock and saw the fish. A plump mullet, suspended a foot above

the bottom, nuzzling and poking at the dull grey weeds that furred the rock. Excited and yet completely sure of himself—so sure that he tendered the usual silent apology—he raised the speargun and pulled the trigger. The gun bucked against his hand; ahead, a metallic muscular flurry, a billow of smoky sea-dust. And then nothing: only the irrevocable spear lying on the sand. Mocking.

Now, trudging up the hill, he smiled. Not the fish's fault, after all. His alone: overeager, he had fired too soon. And so now, my friend, he told himself, you pay the price. No fried fresh mullet for lunch today.

He looked up at the massive shoulder of white rock, jagged, speckled with thyme and sage, that rose behind the fig trees, soaring a hundred feet toward the bright blue cloudless sky. Perched halfway up it he saw (how the *hell* did they do it?) two goats, a beige and a black, tiny at this distance, and indistinct.

And then he saw, below them, parked alongside his Land Rover just this side of the fig trees, the police car.

Any car would have surprised him. His infrequent guests never arrived unannounced; and the road had been graded, intentionally, in such a way that only a four-wheel-

drive vehicle was likely to make it to the top. But a police car?

He glanced quickly around. Police cars invariably made him uneasy. No one was in sight.

The car, he learned when he reached it, was empty. The gate to the fence was open, its padlock hanging on one of the wooden struts of the frame. When he left, the gate had been shut, the padlock locked on the hasp. He entered, closed the gate, walked along the flagstones to the front of the white-washed house. No one beneath the portico. He circled round to the back.

A man, immensely fat, wearing a policeman's uniform, was sitting in one of the chairs under the almond tree on the patio. It was a cheap wooden director's chair, and it looked very frail now as it supported the man's bulk: at least two hundred and fifty pounds of it, probably closer to three.

The man's head was tipped forward, the brim of his cap covering his eyes. His thick arms were folded together above the broad swell of belly. Asleep?

No. Abruptly the man raised his head and, beneath dark black sunglasses, grinned with what was, apparently, huge delight. "Ah," he said, and in Greek: "*O kýrios Fallon, then eísteh?*" Mr. Fallon, are you not?

Fallon nodded. Once; warily. In polite Greek he said, "Yes. How may I help you?"

The man uncrossed his arms and pushed himself from the chair. It squealed, protesting. Grinning, he stepped around the coffee table and offered his hand.

Fallon shifted the speargun, took the hand.

"I am Nikos Mikalis," the fat man announced cheerfully, "the new chief of police for the town. Forgive me for intruding, but I presumed upon your hospitality and waited for you here. Your gate was open."

Fallon smiled pleasantly. "I must have forgotten to lock it." He knew he hadn't. A chief of police who picks locks and then brazenly lies about it: what have we here? "But you are, of course, welcome. I didn't know that Chief Daskalos was no longer with us."

The fat man frowned sadly. "Oh yes, it was very sudden. Four days ago. A family tragedy. His aunt, I believe. Or his cousin." He moved his hand in small vague circles in the air.

"Who can say? We have so many relatives here in Greece."

"Welcome to the island, then," said Fallon. "And, as I said, to my house. And is your visit today professional, or social?"

Mikalis grinned again. "Ah wonderful! You Americans. So

direct, so forthright. It is a quality I very much admire."

Fallon nodded, waiting, wishing he could see the man's eyes behind the dark glasses.

"Well," said Mikalis, "to match your admirable directness with my own, it has occurred to me that it is my obligation, now that I am here, to make the acquaintance of the residents of the town."

Fallon, who noted that the man had not, in fact, answered his question, said, "Very conscientious of you."

"Yes," agreed Mikalis happily, "I believe it is."

"And I'm very flattered that you chose to make mine so soon after you arrived."

"Oh, but Mr. Fallon, you are one of the earliest foreign residents of the island. You are *famous*, of course."

Fallon smiled. "I doubt that. Look, would you mind if I put these things away? It won't take long. And could I get you something? An ouzo? A coffee? Both?"

"Splendid!" said Mikalis. Two enthusiastic bushy eyebrows jumped up from behind the sunglasses. "Both, yes, absolutely."

Fallon nodded. Then, as he turned to leave, Mikalis said, "Are you a lucky man, Mr. Fallon?"

Fallon turned back. The very

blandness of the question had itself been suggestive. "Pardon me?"

"With the fish," said Mikalis, grinning again, ingenuous, as he pointed at the speargun. "Did you have good luck today?"

"No," Fallon said. "Not today."

"Ah well, it doesn't matter." He waved a hand. "They slip away from time to time, but sooner or later we nab them, eh?" He grinned.

Fallon looked at him for a moment, and then said, "If we're lucky." He smiled.

As he busied himself in the kitchen, Fallon wondered what it was the fat man wanted. A bribe? But Fallon's papers were in order, his record on the island spotless.

So why the games? The picking of the padlock, those generalissimo sunglasses, that deliberately ambiguous remark about nabbing fish? Fallon, who had a certain unhappy familiarity with police procedure, and knew that it was, in some respects, similar throughout the world, had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being Mutt-and-Jeffed. With the fat man playing both roles, trying to get him off balance and keep him there.

Well. We shall see.

Onto a large silver tray Fallon loaded everything—the ouzo bottle and two empty glasses, the two tiny cups of Greek coffee, two glasses of water, two forks, some paper napkins, a plate holding sardines, black olives, slices of tomato and cheese—then carried the tray out to the patio.

Chief Mikalis, sitting once again, raised both hands in a gesture of surprised pleasure. "And *mezedes* as well! *Wonderful!*" He leaned slightly forward, confiding: "But I really shouldn't eat anything, you know. I've already had lunch." He patted his round stomach. "Someone told me, just yesterday, that I begin to resemble Orson Welles in the movie *A Touch of Evil*."

In English, Fallon said, "You arrested him, of course." He placed the tray on the table, sat down opposite Mikalis.

Mikalis was looking at him, puzzled. "I'm sorry. I speak no English."

Fallon thought that unlikely, but repeated himself in Greek.

"No, no," said Mikalis. "It was my wife."

Fallon smiled. He opened the bottle of ouzo, poured some into each empty glass, handed one to Mikalis, took one himself. He raised his glass and Mikalis clinked his own against it. "*Styn*

*yeia mas*," Mikalis said. To our health.

"*Yeia mas*," said Fallon.

Mikalis downed his ouzo in one gulp, gave a blissful sigh, and sat back. The chair, once again, squealed beneath him; he ignored it. He looked around him. "*Beautiful grounds*," he said expansively. "And such a house! I understand you built it yourself."

Fallon refilled Mikalis's glass. "With quite a lot of help."

Mikalis took a fork, stabbed at a sardine, and popped it between his teeth. He chewed, swallowed.

"You did a *splendid* job." He lifted the ouzo, tossed it off, sighed again. "Truly quite splendid. But tell me, isn't it true that foreigners are not permitted to own land here in Greece?"

"Of course," said Fallon, and sipped at his ouzo. "I'm only leasing."

"Ah yes," said Mikalis. "Yes, I believe I heard something of this. You lease the land from Dimitri Kostakis, who is also your partner in the nightclub, eh?" With his fork, he impaled a slice of tomato.

Fallon nodded. "You're well informed."

Chewing the tomato, Mikalis shrugged. "Part of the job, merely. Nothing." He leaned forward, aiming the prongs of



the fork thoughtfully at Fallon. "Help me, however, to become more well informed. There is a story that one day, out on your boat, you saved the life of this Dimitri Kostakis. Is this true?"

"An exaggeration," Fallon told him, pouring more ouzo into Mikalis's glass.

"Oh no," said Mikalis, frowning. "Surely not. A sudden storm, was it not? Very violent. And Kostakis's caique had capsized, and the poor man couldn't swim. But you came along and plucked him, yes, *plucked* him—" he speared a sardine and held it up, grinning merrily, "—from a fierce and hungry sea."

"I happened to be nearby," Fallon said. "Luck."

Mikalis ate the sardine, nodding, smiling. He swallowed. "Luck, yes. Very good luck. Excellent luck." He frowned. "As a matter of fact, the luck of Kostakis has been excellent since that day, eh? Soon after this lucky accident at sea he begins to buy land—this piece of property first, and then the piece by the beach, where the two of you built the nightclub." The dark sunglasses peered at Fallon. "Curious, is it not? Where do you suppose a poor fisherman like this could find so much money?"

"The fishing was good that year."

Mikalis smiled. "Without a boat?"

"I sold him mine. Later, when he resold it, he made a profit."

Mikalis smacked his forehead. "This foolish memory of mine, it betrays me every time. Yes, I had forgotten. He made a *splendid* profit, if I've been properly informed. He sold it to that drunken Englishman, did he not? Another friend of yours, as it happens, eh?"

"I know him."

"Of course, yes, now I recall." He lifted his ouzo, swallowed it all. Sighing, he put his elbows on the table and leaned toward Fallon. "Tell me, Mr. Fallon, merely to satisfy my curiosity, how much are you paying for the lease on this property?"

Fallon was certain the man already knew; the information was on public record. "Thirty drachmas a year." He refilled the fat man's glass once again.

Mikalis nodded. "And how much is that, approximately, in your currency?"

"Approximately twenty-five cents."

Mikalis nodded. "Quite a bargain, it would seem."

"You underestimate Dimitri's cunning," said Fallon. "The lease is for ninety years, and he knows I'll be dead before then."

Mikalis looked at him for a moment, then sat back and grinned. "And so here you are,

Mr. Fallon, living on a picturesque Greek island, running a popular and lucrative nightclub. What a life you lead. I envy you. Like Humphrey Bogart, eh, in the movie *Casablanca*?"

"Exactly," Fallon smiled. "Exactly like Humphrey Bogart."

Mikalís smiled, speared a piece of cheese. "Tell me," he said, "are you familiar with Kostakis's sister?"

"Anna? Yes, of course." Anna? Where was all this leading?

Mikalís chewed on the cheese, swallowed it. "And with her husband? The Turk?"

"Ali once worked for us, at the bar."

"Once?" Spearing another sardine. "No longer?"

"We had a disagreement." The boy had broken one of Fallon's, and Dimitri's, cardinal rules, had been selling drugs to tourists. Hashish, in small amounts only, and discreetly. But to the Greek government, there was no such thing as a small amount of hashish; the prison sentences handed down for drug possession were always long ones.

What had Ali done now?

Mikalís swallowed the sardine. "He was found this morning. Stabbed to death. We discovered, in his pocket, a piece of paper with your telephone number on it."

Far off, up the mountain-side, the faint tinkle of a goat bell; nearby, the intoxicated humming of a bee. The wind had died when Fallon came over the ridge, rounded a huge upthrust fist of rock, and padded down a narrow path between yellow thistles. The path ran for a while now along the rim of a ravine choked with ragged boulders and thickets of oleander, the flowers small explosions of pink against the polished green of the leaves. Across the gully, a magpie shrieked and launched itself from a wild olive tree, its white wingtips flickering like flames as it wheeled and banked.

Not Mutt-and-Jeffed, Fallon thought. *Sandbagged*.

For a moment, after Mikalís had told him about Ali, Fallon had very nearly let his anger overwhelm him. He wanted it, perhaps needed it: a cleansing cathartic rage, at Ali's death, at the fat man's stupid games. He realized, immediately, that it would be a mistake.

He took a sip of ouzo, set down his glass, and said, "I'm surprised you didn't bring someone along with you, to take down my confession."

After swallowing a mouthful of cheese, Mikalís smiled. "Why? Did you kill him, Mr. Fallon?"

Fallon kept his voice steady and even. "No."

"Did you see him last night, or speak to him?"

"No."

"When was the last time you did see him?"

"Two weeks ago, maybe three. We passed on the street. We said hello."

"The two of you got along?"

"Well enough."

"He harbored no resentment toward you for this . . . disagreement at the nightclub?"

"No." Fallon remembered Ali's face when he had told him. No resentment there, only puzzlement and hurt. Fallon had explained that the drugs endangered not only Ali himself, but his wife, his brother-in-law, the business. And Ali had nodded sadly, eyes averted, and said in his broken English, "Yes, boss, understand. Sorry, boss."

"And he did not telephone you last night?" Mikalis asked.

"I told you. No."

"Where were you, Mr. Fallon, between three and six o'clock this morning?"

"Here. Asleep. The bar closes at two. I got home a little before three."

"Can anyone corroborate this?"

"Would you like a note from my mother?"

"Mr. Fallon—"

"He was killed sometime between three and six?"

Mikalis frowned, as though

it were not his role to answer questions. Then, at last, he shrugged. "There is no proper pathologist on the island. The doctor who examined him is guessing, merely, but I suspect he is correct. All the bars, like yours, close at two o'clock. By six o'clock, there are people up and about. His body was lying not far from main street. If he had been killed before three, or after six, I believe someone would have seen it happen."

Fallon nodded. "Has the weapon been found?"

"No," Mikalis said. He considered Fallon for a moment. "You were a policeman once yourself, is that not true, Mr. Fallon?"

Fallon said nothing, wondering how Mikalis had known.

"For eight years, I believe, in New York City. Then, some difficulties. Testimony before an investigating committee, innocent yourself but the star witness. Corruption in the police department, bribes, payoffs. Your fellow officers never quite forgave you, eh? Like Al Pacino, yes, in the movie *Serpico*?"

"Daskalos," Fallon said, suddenly realizing. "Daskalos had a file on me." It surprised him.

Mikalis shrugged. "Of course. This is a frontier island, only thirty miles from Turkey. You are a foreigner. He felt he needed

to know. He had an associate in the American government. It took only a letter to him."

Mikalís lifted the ouzo bottle, poured some into his glass, some into Fallon's. He set down the bottle, clicked his glass against Fallon's, and tossed back the ouzo. He put the glass on the table and leaned forward, elbows on the arms of the chair. "As a former policeman, perhaps you can understand something. Whoever killed that boy was someone who knew how to use a knife. He stabbed him once, just below the rib cage and up into the heart. And he did this in what is now *my* town, on *my* island. Whoever he is, wherever he is, I am going to find him."

He poured more ouzo into his glass, returned the bottle to the table. "Now," he said. "Can you tell me why he would have your phone number?"

"No," Fallon said. "Have you talked with Anna or Dimitri?"

Mikalís nodded. "The boy telephoned Kostakis at one o'clock last night, asking for your number. He wouldn't explain why he wanted it."

"He could have come to the bar. Or called me there. He knew I stayed there until three."

"Presumably, what he wished to discuss was private."

Fallon frowned. "Have you talked to the people he worked

with? I heard that he got a job on one of the boats."

Mikalís nodded. "A Turkish boat, yes, the *Yesmin*. I spoke with the other hands. Ali left the boat, they said, at twelve o'clock last night. He never returned."

"You've searched the boat?"

Mikalís smiled blandly. "For what?"

"The obvious," Fallon said. "Drugs."

"Ah," said Mikalis. "Drugs." He nodded. "I know, you see, about the cause of your 'disagreement' with the boy. And here is a boat registered in Turkey, from where hashish comes, and opium. Drugs were the first thing I considered. I telephoned to Rhodes, and had the harbor police there send up, on this morning's hydrofoil, one of their trained dogs. We searched the boat, the dog searched the boat. No drugs."

"Besides," he said, "the *Yesmin* has been out of the harbor only once in the past few weeks, yesterday, and for only two hours. They are getting her ready to sail to Amsterdam, where the owner is waiting for her. A Mr. Hadji."

"Amsterdam," Fallon said. It was the point, he knew, at which most hard drugs entered Europe by ship.

Mikalís smiled. "There are no drugs on the boat."

"Perhaps they plan to load the boat after they leave, on their way to Holland. Perhaps Ali learned about it."

"The boat," said Mikalis, "will of course be watched after it leaves port."

"And when will that be?"

"A day or two." He shrugged. "I have neither the authority nor the desire to hold her. I can establish no connection between the boat and the boy's death."

"This Hadji," Fallon said, "who is he?"

"A financier. Whatever that is. All I know is that he is rich, and that he is influential. Why all these questions about the boat?"

"You said that the boat went out into the harbor yesterday. Ali was killed last night. You don't find that suggestive?"

"Mr. Fallon," Mikalis said, "I can, if I wish, find *anything* suggestive. But in terms of actual facts, I have only a dead Turkish boy and a slip of paper with a telephone number on it. *Your* telephone number." He raised the ouzo, drank it off. He stood, reached into his shirt pocket, took out a pen and a piece of paper, scribbled something. He handed the paper to Fallon. "*My* telephone number, at home. Call me if you remember anything else."

And, without offering his

hand, he had turned and waddled off through the shade, toward the gate and his car.

A nice exit, Fallon had thought.

And now, an hour later, gravel crunched beneath Fallon's sandals as he approached the ruined Doric temple. Small, no more than twenty feet long, it stood in the midst of a grove of cypresses, overlooking the sea on a rise of land jutting out from the mountainside. Two of its columns had been reassembled atop its uneven marble floor; segments of others lay nearby among the weeds and grasses and brown pine needles.

The Italian archaeologists who had begun excavating it in the early 1920's had never finished their work, probably because larger and more important sites had been unearthed on the other, more easily accessible, side of the island. It was still mentioned by one of the tourist books (in a nicely-phrased aside: "small temple of undetermined god"), but the only road approaching it was rutted dirt, poorly maintained. Fallon had never seen anyone else there. It was his favorite place on the island.

He sat down at midpoint on the marble floor in the full lotus position, spine erect, his back to the deep, distracting blue of the sea, and began *zazen*. After

his wife's death, he had slowly become involved in Zen Buddhism, trying, he realized later, to fill up the emptiness that the loss of Megan had left within him.

Years ago, that had been, before he sold the restaurant he and Megan had opened and once run together. Before the boat, before the island.

He sat now in the center of a stillness, attending only to his breath. Time passed. Twenty minutes. Forty. At last, taking in a final deep lungful of air, he stood. He knew, without having thought about it consciously, exactly what he was going to do.

No blame, the I Ching would say. In one sense, no one is responsible for the life of another. But guilts, nevertheless, sometimes still remain.

"Yes, boss, understand. Sorry, boss . . ."

When he returned to the house, he called Anna, offered condolences and any help she might need. He called Dimitri, and from him learned that the *Yesmin* had been moored in the harbor for a year, having left it only for an occasional day trip.

Then, in the storeroom, he checked his scuba tanks. The air pressure was down slightly, so he topped them off with the compressor. He carried them, and the duffel bag containing

his mask, flippers, and weight belt, out to the Rover and stashed them in the back. He drove into town.

The *Yesmin* was moored in a slip not far from his own former boat, the *Meltemi*. He had seen her before, over the past year, without really noticing her. As he drove past, he looked her over.

A ketch, standard configuration, maybe forty-five feet long, white fiberglass hull, teak decking. Good lines, probably Swedish built. No one was topside.

He parked before the *Meltemi*, went aboard, asked Brian Leonard, the Englishman who eight years ago had bought her from him, via Dimitri, if he could have the use of the boat later that night. Brian, who preferred to sleep at the house of his mistress, a widow who owned a local taverna and kept him supplied with free Greek brandy, agreed.

Fallon drove to Le Cirque. It was a long night, tourists crowding the room until closing time, and he couldn't get away until two thirty.

A full moon hung overhead. On the deserted street fronting the harbor, the cafes and tavernas were locked; all the sidewalk tables and chairs, ar-

ranged in neat geometrical rows, were empty. From the bowline of the *Meltemi*, Fallon lowered himself into the water.

It was dark and not particularly clean. Diesel fuel filmed the surface, bits of refuse—an orange peel, a limp scrap of paper—bobbed and drifted. Still holding onto the line, he tested the regulator with two quick breaths. Then, letting go of the line, he dived.

Slowly, blindly, he went to the bottom, twenty-five feet down; his fingers jerked back instinctively as they sank into the ooze. He righted himself, then waited there, blinking behind the mask, letting his eyes adjust to the faint moonlight sifting down through the darkness. At last he could make out, directly overhead, the black silhouette of the *Meltemi's* hull against the silvered surface. Twelve hulls down lay the *Yes-min*.

He paddled off toward her, into the murk, his regulator hissing and gurgling as he inhaled and exhaled. Although it sounded preternaturally loud in the blackness, he knew it was inaudible above the water. More dangerous was the trail of bubbles in his wake. Anyone up there, awake and watching, could spot it.

He had paused beneath the fourth dark hull when, in the

cloudy water off to his left, something moved. Something large, a ponderous, predatory shadow. He froze, and suddenly his heart was thumping against his ears.

Not a shark, he told himself. How many sharks have you seen in eight years? No, a grouper, or maybe a big mullet, magnified by the water, by the mask.

He waited, suspended in the water. He saw nothing. Whatever it had been, it was gone now.

He let out his breath and began swimming again.

Not a shark, he told himself. But the water seemed colder, more alien, than it had before.

Ten hulls . . . eleven . . . twelve.

He rose very slowly, keeping his breathing shallow to minimize the bubbles. Flippering up along the keel, he reached out and let his fingers trail against the cool, slick fiberglass. Now, in the filtered moonlight, he could see the white glow of the underhull.

And then a powerful hand clamped around his left ankle.

Without thinking, without even looking back, Fallon made a great twisting lunge, thrusting out with his right foot. He wrenched free, his left flipper gone.

Later he realized what had



happened. One of the Turks, on guard topside, had seen the water roiling where Fallon's bubbles emerged, had at once known what they meant. Had quietly slipped into the water and come after him. Even without tanks, without a mask, he would have had no fear of the sea: Fallon knew of Turks and Greeks alike who could free-dive to a hundred feet, and stay there for a full minute.

Fallon raced headlong into the gloom, still not looking back. He thought he had made it, that he was clear, when suddenly the hand clutched at him again.

He whirled, bubbles boiling around him: *Knife*, he thought. *There has to be a knife.*

The Turk was only a vague dark shape against the grey, an impossible sea creature. Fallon kicked his left foot out toward the shadowy face. The Turk jerked back. Fallon ripped free the weight belt at his waist and, holding one end in his right hand, let it swing before him. Watching the Turk, he backed away.

The advantage was still Fallon's. His mask provided visibility, his tanks provided mobility. The other man couldn't stay under much longer.

When the Turk darted forward, right arm swinging toward him, Fallon saw the moonlit gleam of the knife blade

as it slashed for his stomach. He whipped the weight belt at the knife hand, furious at how slowly he moved against the resistance of the water.

The Turk's move had been a feint; the blade slipped away from the belt, tore up toward Fallon's face, sliced past it. And sheared his air hose.

All at once Fallon's mouth was filled with water.

The Turk shot toward the surface to snatch another breath before he returned and finished Fallon off.

Quickly, knowing he had little time, Fallon unbuckled the scuba harness, shrugged out of it, then, holding the tanks above him like a weapon, kicked himself upward.

The Turk was still at the surface, and Fallon's tanks caught him just below the sternum. He doubled up around them, as though trying to fold them in an embrace. And then Fallon was up himself, face free of the water, lungs lurching for air as his left hand went for the knife and his right arm coiled around the Turk's neck, going for the chokehold. . . .

“**N**eh?” Yes? The voice of Chief Mikalis.  
“This is Fallon.”

“Ah, Mr. Fallon! What a

pleasure! I was just thinking of you."

"You sound very cheerful for five o'clock in the morning."

"Thank you. But you, I am afraid, do not."

"I'm using the public phone here in the square, and I can't stop this stupid shaking."

"Shaking? Whatever for?"

"Never mind. Listen, I have a gift for you."

"Indeed?"

"A Turkish deck hand."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Tied up, unconscious, on the *Meltemi*."

"Ah."

"And I have a knife. It may be the same knife that killed Ali."

"Ah."

"He tried to use it on me. I swam out to the *Yesmin* tonight, to see if I could find something you people missed."

"Ah."

"Ah? Is that all you can say?"

"Well, to be perfectly frank, Mr. Fallon, I already knew about the Turk."

"You—wait a minute. You had someone watching the boat."

"Yes. I just finished speaking with him. He is stationed in a room above one of the cafes."

"... So he saw everything."

"Oh yes. Everything. Saw you arrive at the Englishman's boat with your underwater equipment, saw you enter the

water. He was quite concerned there, for a moment, when the Turk went into the water after you, with the knife."

"Concerned."

"Quite, yes. But by the time he got down to the water, you were towing the man to the other boat."

In English, Fallon said, "You suckered me. You set me up."

"*Signómeh?*" Excuse me?

"You used me," Fallon said in Greek.

"Yes. Yes, I am afraid I did. The relationship between Greece and Turkey is, as you know, at the moment rather delicate. I could afford to bring only so much pressure to bear on the crew of that boat—we need no diplomatic incidents here. But it occurred to me that you, as an American, would have no such restraints. From what I had learned of you, you appeared the sort of person who would seek things out for himself. Yes, my friend, I confess that I did use you as a sort of, what is the word?, yes, *catalyst*."

"The word is *pawn*. You realize that I nearly got myself killed?"

"Ah, yes, that is most regrettable. I am truly sorry. And truly surprised. I had not expected them to react with so much... enthusiasm. They must be very frightened. I

thought that if you . . . ah . . . *prodded* them in some way, they would merely make an attempt to frighten you off."

"They frightened me, all right."

"But even that, you see, would have been enough pretext for me to hold the boat while I continued the investigation. Now, of course, things have worked out splendidly. I have already dispatched a car to pick up the Turk. If you are willing to testify against him, we can bring a charge of attempted murder. The knife will be sent to Athens for examination. I have learned from the doctor that the blood of the boy, Ali, is of an unusual type. Perhaps we can establish that the knife was the murder weapon. Perhaps not. The important thing is that I can keep the boat here until I learn more."

"Keeping the boat is a very good idea."

"*Signómeh?*"

"That boat isn't the *Yesmin*."

"I do not understand."

"The *Yesmin* has been here, in the water, for over a year. She would be ready for cleaning, in drydock. That boat in the harbor has been in the water no longer than a week. Her hull is brand new. No fouling, no barnacles, nothing. It's a duplicate. A copy. They switched boats when they took

the *Yesmin* out the other day."

" . . . So you are telling me—"

"The keel. The drugs are built into the keel. That's why the dog couldn't smell them. And there are probably a lot of them, judging by all the time and effort required."

"Ah. Good. *Good*. Excellent, Mr. Fallon."

"I doubt that you'll be able to prove anything against the owner, Hadji. He can always claim he knew nothing about it. But you should be able to send the crewmen away for quite a while. And they're the ones responsible for Ali's death. Ali must have had second thoughts about being involved in something like this. The others suspected, and they killed him." Killed him before he could call Fallon and ask for his advice.

"Mr. Fallon," said Mikalis, "I am most grateful."

"Fine," said Fallon. "I'm going home."

Then, in a demonstration not only of fluent English, but also of considerable skill as a mimic, Mikalis said, "You know, Louis, this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship." Bogart, to Claude Rains.

Despite himself, Fallon laughed. He said, "That's supposed to be *my* line." But Mikalis, with a mimic's sense of timing, had already hung up.

# UNSOLVED

by George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the June issue.

Alice, Alice's husband, their son, their daughter, and Alice's brother were involved in a murder. One of the five killed one of the other four. The following facts refer to the five people mentioned:

1. A man and a woman were together in a bar at the time of the murder.
2. The victim and the killer were together on a beach at the time of the murder.
3. One of the two children was alone at the time of the murder.
4. Alice and her husband were not together at the time of the murder.
5. The victim's twin was innocent.
6. The killer was younger than the victim.

*Which one of the five was the victim?*

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See page 109 for the solution to the April puzzle.

*"Malice and Alice," taken from New Puzzles in Logical Deduction by George J. Summers. Copyright © 1968 by George J. Summers. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.*

FICTION

# Eight Mile and Dequindre

by Loren D. Estleman



Illustration by Ron Chironna

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**T**he client was a no-show, as four out of ten of them tend to be.

She had called me in the customary white heat, a woman with one of those voices you hear in supermarkets and then thank God you're not married, and arranged to meet me someplace not my office and not her home. The bastard had been paying her the same alimony for the past five years, she'd said, and she wanted a handle on his secret bank accounts to prove he was making twice as much as when they split. In the meantime she'd cooled down or the situation had changed or she'd found a private investigator who worked even cheaper than I did, leaving me to drink yellow coffee alone at a linoleum counter in a gray cinder-block building on Dequindre at Eight Mile Road. I was just as happy. Why I'd agreed to meet her at all had to do with a bank balance smaller than my IQ, and since talking to her I'd changed my mind and decided to refer her to another agency anyway. So I worked on my coffee and once again considered taking on a security job until things got better.

A portable radio behind the counter was tuned to a Pistons game, but the guy who'd poured my coffee, lean and young with butch-cut red hair and a white apron, didn't look to be listen-

ing to it, whistling while he chalked new prices on the blackboard menu on the wall next to the cash register. Well, it was March, and the Pistons were where they usually were in the standings at that time and nobody in Detroit was listening. I asked him what the chicken on a roll was like.

"Better than across the street," he said, wiping chalk off his hands onto the apron.

Across the street was a Shell station. I ordered the chicken anyway; unless he skipped some lines it was too far down on the board for him to raise the price before I'd eaten it. He opened a stainless steel door over the sink and took the plastic off a breaded patty the color of fresh sawdust and slapped it hissing on the griddle.

We'd had the place to ourselves for a while, but then the pneumatic front door whooshed and sucked in a male customer in his thirties and a sportcoat you could hear across the street, who cocked a hip onto a stool at the far end of the counter and asked for a glass of water.

"Anything to go with that?" asked Butch, setting an amber-tinted tumbler in front of him.

"No, I'm waiting for someone."

"Coffee, maybe."

"No, I want to keep my breath fresh."

"Oh. That kind of someone."

He wiped his hands again. "It's okay for now, but if the place starts to fill up you'll have to order something, a Coke or something. You don't have to drink it."

"Sounds fair."

"This ain't a bus station."

"I can see that."

Nodding, Butch turned away and picked up a spatula and flipped the chicken patty and broke a roll out of plastic. The guy in the sportcoat asked how the game was going, but Butch either didn't hear him or didn't want to. The guy gave up on him and glanced down the counter at me.

"You waiting for someone, too?"

"I was," I said. "Now I'm waiting for that bird."

"Stood you up, huh? That's tough."

"I'm used to it."

He hesitated, then got down and picked up his glass and carried it to my end and climbed onto the stool next to mine. Up close he was about thirty, freckled, with a double chin starting and dishwater hair going thin in front. A triangle of white shirt showed between his belt buckle and the one button he had fastened on the jacket. He had prominent front teeth and looked a little like Howdy Doody.

"This girl I'm waiting for would never stand anyone

up," he said. "She's got manners."

"Yeah?"

"No, really. Looks too. Here's her picture." He took a fat curved wallet out of his hip pocket and showed me the head and torso of a blonde in a red bandana top winking and grinning at the camera. She stank professional model.

"Nice," I said. "What's she do?"

"Waitress at the Peacock's Roost. That'll change when we're married. I don't want my wife to work."

"The girls in steel-rimmed glasses and iron pants will burn their bras on your lawn."

"To hell with them. Rena won't have anything to do with that kind. That's her name, Rena."

"I think it's dead now," I told Butch.

He landed the chicken patty on one half of the roll and planted the other half on top and put it on a china saucer and set the works on the linoleum. Howdy Doody finished putting away his wallet and stuck his right hand across his body in front of me. "Dave Tillet."

"Amos Walker." I shook the hand and picked up the sandwich. As it turned out I wouldn't have done any worse across the street at the Shell station.

Tillet sipped his water. "That clock right?"



Butch looked up to see which clock he meant. There was only one in the place, advertising Stroh's beer on the wall behind the counter. "Give or take a minute."

"She ought to be here now. She's usually early."

"Maybe she stood you up after all," I said.

"Not Rena."

I ate the chicken and Tillet drank his water and the guy behind the counter picked up his chalk and resumed changing prices and didn't listen to the basketball game. I wiped my mouth with a cheesy paper napkin and asked Butch what the tariff was. He said, "Buck ninety-five." I got out my wallet.

"Maybe I better call her," said Tillet. "That phone working?"

Butch said it was. Tillet drained his glass and went to the pay telephone on the wall just inside the door. I paid for the sandwich and coffee.

"Well, good luck," I told Tillet on my way past him.

"What? Yeah, thanks. You too." He was listening to the purring in the earpiece. I pushed on the glass door.

Two guys were on their way in and I stepped aside and held the door for them. They were wearing dark Windbreakers and colorful knit caps, and when

they saw me they reached up with one hand apiece and rolled the caps down over their faces and the caps turned into ski masks. Their other hands were coming out of the slash pockets of the Windbreakers and when I saw that I jumped back and let go of the door, but the man closest to it caught it with his arm and stuck a long-barreled .22 target pistol in my face while his partner came in past him and lamped the place quickly and then put the .22's twin almost against Tillet's noisy sportcoat. Three flat reports slapped the air. Tillet's mouth was open and he was leaning one shoulder against the wall and he hadn't had time to start falling or even know he was shot when the guy fired again into his face and then deliberately moved the gun and gave him another in the ear. The guy's buddy wasn't watching. He was looking at me through the eyeholes in his mask and his eyes were as flat and gray as nickels on a pad. They held no more expression than the empty blue hole also staring me in the face.

Then the pair left, Gray Eyes backing away with his gun still on me while his partner walked swiftly to a brown Plymouth Volare and around to the driver's side and got in and then Gray Eyes let himself in the passenger's side and they were

rolling before he got the door closed.

Tillet fell then, crumpling in on himself like a gas bag deflating, and folded to the floor with no more noise than laundry makes skidding down a chute. Very bright red blood leaked out of his ear and slid into a puddle on the gray linoleum floor.

I ran out to the sidewalk in time to see the Plymouth take the corner. Forget about the license number. I wasn't wearing a gun. I hardly ever needed one to meet a woman in a diner.

When I went back in, the counterman was standing over Tillet's body, wiping his hands over and over on his apron. His face was as pale as the cloth. The telephone receiver swung from its cord and the metallic purring on the other end was loud in the silence following the shots. I bent and placed two fingers on Tillet's neck. Nothing was happening in the big artery. I straightened, picked up the receiver, worked the plunger and dialed 911. Standing there waiting for someone to answer I was sorry I'd eaten the chicken.

**T**hey sent an Adam and Eve team, a white man and a black woman in uniform. You had to look twice at the woman to know she was a woman. They hadn't gotten around to cutting uniforms

to fit them, and her tunic hung on her like a tarpaulin. Her partner had baby fat in his cheeks and a puppy mustache. His face went stiff when he saw the body. The woman might have been looking at a loose tile on the floor for all her expression gave up. Just to kill time I gave them the story, knowing I'd have to do it all over again for the plainclothes team. Butch was sitting on one of the customer's stools with his hands in his lap, and whenever they looked at him he nodded in agreement with my details. The woman took it all down in shorthand.

The first string arrived ten minutes later. Among them was a black lieutenant, coarse-featured and heavy in the chest and shoulders, wearing a gray suit cut in heaven and a black tie with a silver diamond pattern. When he saw me, he groaned.

"Hello, John," I said. "This is a hike from headquarters."

John Alderdyce of Detroit Homicide patted all his pockets and came up with an empty Lucky Strikes package. I gave him a Winston from my pack and took one for myself and lit them both. He squirted smoke and said, "I was eight blocks from here when I got the squeal. If I'd known you were back of it, I'd have kept driving."

John and I had known each

other a long time, a thing I admitted to a lot more often than he did. While I was recounting the last few minutes in the life of Dave Tillet, a police photographer came in and took pictures of the body from forty different angles and then a bearded black Homicide sergeant I didn't know tugged on a pair of surgical gloves and knelt and started going through Tillet's clothes. Butch had recovered from his shock by this time and come over to watch. "Them gloves are to protect the fingerprints, right?" he asked.

"Wrong. Catch." The sergeant tossed him Tillet's wallet.

Butch caught it against his chest. "It's wet."

"That's why the gloves."

Butch thought about it, then dropped the wallet quickly and mopped his hands on his apron.

"Can the crap," barked Alderdyce. "What's inside?"

Still chuckling, the sergeant picked up the wallet and went through the contents. He whistled. "Christ, it's full of C-notes. Eight, ten, twelve—this guy was carrying fifteen hundred bucks on his hip."

"What else?"

The celluloid windows gave up a Social Security card and a temporary driver's license, both made out to David Edward Tillet, and the picture of the blonde.

"That Rena?" Alderdyce asked.

I nodded. "She waits tables at the Peacock's Roost, Tillet said."

Alderdyce told the sergeant to bag the wallet and its contents. To me: "You saw these guys' before they pulled down their ski masks?"

"Not enough before. They were just guys' faces. I didn't much look at them till they went for the guns. The trigger was my height, maybe ten pounds to the good. His partner gave up a couple of inches, same build, gray eyes." I described the getaway car.

"Stolen," guessed the sergeant. He stood and slid a glassine bag containing the wallet into the side pocket of his coat.

Alderdyce nodded. "It was a market job. The girl was the finger. She's smoke by now. Dope?"

"That or numbers," said the sergeant. "He's a little pale for either one in this town, but the rackets are nothing if not an equal opportunity employer. Nobody straight carries cash any more."

"I still owe a thousand on this building." Butch's upper lip was folded over his chin. "I guess I'd be dumb to pay it off now."

"The place is made," the sergeant told him.

"Yeah?" The counterman looked hopefully at Alderdyce, who grunted.

"The Machus Red Fox is booked into next year and has been ever since Hoffa bought his last ride in front of it."

"Yeah?"

The lieutenant was still looking at me. "When can you come down and sign a statement?"

"Whenever it's ready. I'm not exactly swamped."

"Five o'clock, then." He paused. "Your part in this is finished, right?"

"When I work I get paid," I said.

"How come that doesn't comfort me?"

I said I'd see him at five.

The morgue wagon was just creaking its brakes in front when I came out into the afternoon sunlight and walked around the blue-and-white and a couple of unmarked units and a green Fiat to my heap. I was about to get behind the wheel when I stopped and looked again at the Fiat. The girl Dave Tillet had called Rena was sitting in the driver's seat, staring at the blank cinderblock wall in front of the windshield.

I opened the door on the passenger side and got in next to her. She jumped in the seat and looked at me quickly. Her honey-colored hair was caught in a clasp behind her neck, below which a kind of pony tail hung down her back, and she was wearing a

tailored navy suit over a cream-colored blouse open at the neck and jet buttons in her ears, but I recognized her large smoky eyes and the just slightly too-wide mouth that was built for grinning, although she wasn't grinning. The interior of the little car smelled of car and sandalwood.

She snatched up a blue bag from the seat and her hand vanished inside. I caught her wrist. She struggled, but I applied pressure and her face went white and she stopped struggling. I relaxed the hold, but just a little.

"Dave's dead," I said. "You can't help him now."

She said nothing. On "dead," her head jerked as if I'd smacked her. I went on.

"You don't want to be here when the cops come out. They've got your picture and they think you fingered Dave."

"That's stupid." Her voice came from just in back of her tongue. I didn't know how it was normally.

"It's not stupid. He was expecting you and got five slugs from a .22. The cops know where you work and pretty soon they'll know where you live, and when they find you they'll book you as a material witness and change it to accessory to the fact later."

"You talk like you're not one of them."

"Get real, lady. If I were, we wouldn't be sitting here talking. On the other hand, if you set up Dave deliberately you wouldn't be here at all. It could just be you're someone who could use some help."

Her lips twisted. "And it could just be you're someone who could give it."

"We're talking," I reminded her. "I'm not hollering cop."

"Who the hell are you?"

I told her. Her lips twisted some more.

"A cheap snooper. I should have guessed it would be something like that."

I said, "It's a buyer's market. I don't set the price."

"What's the price?"

"Some truth. Not right now, though. Not here. Let's go somewhere."

"You go," she said. "I've got a pistol in this purse and when I pull the trigger it won't much matter whether it's inside or outside."

I didn't move. "Guns, everybody's got 'em. After a killer's screwed one in your face the rest aren't so scary."

We sat like that for a while, she with her hand in the purse and turned a little in the seat so that one silken knee showed under the hem of her pleated skirt while a cramp crawled across the palm I had clenched on her wrist. The morgue crew came out the front door of the

diner wheeling a stretcher with a zipped bag full of Dave Tillet on it and folded the works into the back of the wagon. Rena didn't look at them. Finally I let go of her and got out one of my cards and a pen. I moved slowly to avoid attracting bullets.

"I'll just put my home address and telephone number on the back," I said, writing. "Open twenty-four hours. Just ring and ask for Amos. But do it before the cops get you or I'm just another spent shell."

She said nothing. I tucked the card under the mirror she had clamped to the sun visor on the passenger's side and got out and into my crate and started the motor and swung out into the street and took off with my cape flying behind me.

I made some calls from the office, but none of the security firms or larger investigation agencies in town had anything to farm out. I bought myself a drink from the file drawer in the desk and when that was finished I bought myself another, and by then it was time to go to police headquarters at 1300 Beaubien, or just plain 1300 as it's known in town. The lady detective who announced me to John Alderdyce was too much detective not to notice the scotch on my breath but too much lady to mention

it. Little by little they are changing things down there, but it's a slow process.

In John's office I gave my story again to a stenographer while Alderdyce and the bearded sergeant listened for variations. When the steno left to type up my statement, I asked John what he'd found out.

"Tillet kept the books for Great Lakes Importers. Ever hear of it?"

"Front for the mob."

"So you say. It's worth a slander suit if you say it in public, they're that well screened with lawyers and holding corporations." He broke open a fresh pack of Luckies and fired one up with a Zippo. I already had a Winston going. "Tillet rented a house in Southfield. A grand a month."

"Any grand jury investigations in progress?" I asked. "They're hard on the bookkeeping population."

He shook his head. "We got a call in to the feds, but even if they get back to us we'll still have to go up to the mountain to get any information out of those tight-mouthed clones. We're pinning our hopes on the street trade and this woman Rena. Especially her."

"What'd you turn on her?"

"She works at the Peacock's Roost like you said, goes by Rena Murrow. She didn't show up for the four P.M. shift today.

She's got an apartment on Michigan and we have men waiting for her there, but she's empty tracks by now. Tillet's landlady says he's been away someplace on vacation. Lying low. Whoever wanted him out in the open got to Rena. By all accounts she is a woman plenty of scared accountants would break cover to meet."

"Maybe someone used her."

He grinned that tight grin that was always bad news for someone. "Your license to hunt Dulcineas still valid?"

"Everyone needs a hobby," I said. "Stamps are sissy."

"Safer, though. According to the computer, this damsel has two priors for soliciting, but that was before she started bumming around with one Peter Venito. 'Known former associate,' it says in the print-out. Computers have no romance in their circuits."

I smoked and thought. Peter Venito, born Pietro, had come up through the Licavoli mob during Prohibition and during the old Kefauver Committee hearings had been identified as one of the five dons on the board of governors of that fraternal organization the Italian Anti-Defamation League would have us believe no longer exists.

"Venito's been dead four or five years," I said.

"Six. But his son Paul's still around and a slice off the old

pizza. His secretary at Great Lakes Importers says he's in Las Vegas. Importing."

"Anything on the street soldiers?"

"Computer got a hernia sorting through gray eyes and the heights and builds you gave us. I'd go to the mugs, but you say you didn't get a long enough hinge at them without their masks, so why go into golden time? Just sign the statement and give my eyes a rest from your ugly pan."

The stenographer had just returned with three neatly typewritten sheets. I read my words and wrote my name at the bottom. "I have it on good authority I'm a heartbreaker," I told Alderdyce, handing him the sheets.

"What's a Dulcinea, anyway?" asked the sergeant.

**T**he shooting at Eight Mile and Dequindre was on the radio. They got my name and occupation right, anyway. I switched to a music station and drove through coagulating dusk to my little three-room house west of Hamtramck, where I put my key in a door that was already unlocked. I'd locked it when I left that morning.

I went back for the Luger I keep in a special compartment under the dash, and when I had a round in the chamber I

sneaked up on the door with my back to the wall and twisted the knob and pushed the door open at arm's length. When no bullets tore through the opening, I eased the gun and my face past the doorframe. Rena was sitting in my one easy chair in the living room with a .32 Remington automatic in her right hand and a bottle of scotch and a half-full glass standing on the end table on the other side.

"I thought it might be you," she said. "That's why I didn't shoot."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"You ought to get yourself a dead-bolt lock. I've known how to slip latches since high school."

"All they taught me was algebra." I waved the Luger. "Can we put up the artillery? It's starting to get silly."

She laid the pistol in her lap. I snicked the safety into place on mine and put it on the table near the door and closed the door behind me. She picked up her glass and sipped from it. "You buy good whisky. Key-hole-peeping must pay pretty good."

"That's my Christmas bottle."

"Your friends must like you."

"I bought it for myself." I went into the kitchen and got a glass and filled it from the bottle.



She said, "The cops were waiting for me at my place. One of them was smoking a pipe. I smelled it the minute I hit my floor."

"The world's full of morons." I drank.

"What's it going to cost me to get clear of this?"

"How much you got?"

She glanced down at the blue bag wedged between her left hip and the arm of the chair. It was a nice hip, long and slim with the pleated navy skirt stretched taut over it. "Five hundred."

I shrugged.

"All of it?"

"It'd run you that and more to put breathing space between you and Detroit," I said. "It wouldn't buy you a day in any of the safe houses in town."

"What will I eat on?"

"On the rest of it. You knew damn well I'd set my price at whatever you said you had, so I figure you knocked it down by at least half."

She twisted her lips in that way she had and opened the bag and peeled three C-notes and four fifties off a roll that would choke a tuba. I accepted the bills and riffled through them and stuck the wad in my inside breast pocket.

"How's Paul?" I asked.

"He's in Vegas," she answered automatically. Then she looked up at me quickly and

pursed her lips. I cut her off.

"The cops know about you and old Peter Venito, may he rest in peace. The word on the street is young Paul inherited everything."

"Not everything."

I was lighting a cigarette and so didn't bother to shrug. I flipped the match into an ash-tray. "Dave Tillet."

"I liked Dave. He wasn't like the others who worked for Paul. He wanted to go out. He was all set to take the CPA exam in May."

"He didn't just like you," I said. "He was planning to marry you."

She raised her eyebrows. They were darker than her hair, two inverted commas over eyes that I saw now were ringed with red under her makeup.

"I didn't know," she said quietly.

"Who dropped the dime on him?"

Now her face took on the hard sheen of polished metal. "All right, so you tricked me into admitting I know Paul Venito. That doesn't mean I know the heavyweights he hires."

"You've answered my question. When a bookkeeper for the mob starts making leaving noises, his employers start wondering where he's going with what he knows. What'd Venito do to get you to set up Dave?"

"I didn't set him up!"

I smoked and waited. In the silence she looked at the wall behind me and then at the floor and then at her hands on the purse in her lap and then she drained her glass and refilled it. The neck of the bottle jingled against the rim. She drank.

"Dave went into hiding a week ago because of some threats he said he got over his decision to quit," she said. "None of them came from Paul, but from his own fellow workers. He gave me a number where he could be reached and told me to memorize it and not write it down or give it to anyone else. I'd gone with Paul for a while after old Peter died and Paul knew I was seeing Dave and he came to my apartment yesterday and asked me where he could reach Dave. I wouldn't give him the number. He said he just wanted to talk to him and would I arrange a meeting without saying it would be with Paul. He was afraid Dave's fellow workers had poisoned him against the whole operation. He wanted to make Dave a cash offer to keep quiet about his, Paul's, activities and that if I cared for him and his future I'd agree to help. I said okay. It sounded like the Paul Venito I used to know," she added quickly. "He would spend thousands to avoid hurting someone; he said that was bad

business and cost more in the long run."

"Who picked the spot?"

"Paul did. He called it neutral territory, halfway between Dave's place in Southfield and Paul's office downtown."

"It's also handy to expressways out of the city," I said. "So you set up the parley. Then what?"

"I called Paul's office today to ask him if I could sit in on the meeting. His secretary told me he left for Las Vegas last night. That's when I knew he had no intention of keeping his appointment, or of being anywhere near the place when whoever was keeping it for him went in to see Dave. I broke every law driving there, but—"

The metal sheen cracked apart then. She said, "Damn," and dug in her purse for a handkerchief. I watched her pawing blindly through the contents for a moment, then handed her mine. If it was an act, it was sweet.

"Did anyone follow you here?" I asked.

She wiped her eyes, blew her nose as discreetly as a thing like that can be done, and looked up. Her cheeks were smeared blue-black. That was when I decided to believe her. You don't look like her and know how to turn the waterworks on and off without knowing how to keep your mascara from running.

"I don't think so," she said. "I kept an eye out for cops and parked around the corner. Why?"

"Because if what you told me is straight, you're next on Venito's list of Things To Do Today. You're the only one who can connect him to that diner. Have you got a place to stay?"

"I guess one of the girls from the Roost could put me up."

"No, the cops will check them out. They'll hit all the hotels and motels, too. You'd better stay here."

"Oh." She gave me her crooked smile. "That plus the five hundred, is that how it goes?"

"I'll toss you for the bed. Loser gets the couch."

"You don't like blondes?"

"I'm not sure I ever met one. But it has something to do with not going to the bathroom where you eat. Give me your keys and I'll stash your car in the garage. Cops'll have a BOL out by now."

She was reaching inside her purse when the door buzzer blew us a raspberry. Her hand went to the baby Remington. I touched a finger to my lips and pointed at the bedroom door. She got up, clutching her purse and the gun, and went into the bedroom and pushed the door shut, or almost. She left a crack. I retrieved my handkerchief stained with her makeup from the chair and put it in a pocket and picked up the Luger and

said, "Who is it?"

"Alderdyce."

I opened the door. He glanced down at the gun as if it were a loose button on my jacket and walked around me into the living room. "Expecting trouble?"

"It's a way of life in this town." I safetied the Luger and returned it to the table.

"You alone?"

"Who's asking, you or the department?"

He said nothing, circling the living room with his hands in his pockets. He stopped near the bedroom door and sniffed the air. "Nice cologne. A little feminine."

"Even detectives have a social life," I said.

"You couldn't prove it by me."

I killed my cigarette butt and fought the tug to reach for a replacement. "You didn't come all this way to do Who's On First with me."

"We tracked down Paul Venito. I thought you'd want to know."

"In Vegas?"

He moved his large close-cropped head from side to side slowly. "At Detroit Metropolitan Airport. Stiff as a stick in the trunk of a stolen Oldsmobile."

**T**he antique clock my grandfather bought for his mother knocked out the better part of a min-

ute with no competition. I shook out my last Winston and smoothed it between my fingers. "Shot?"

"Three times with a .22. Twice in the chest, once in the ear. Sound familiar?"

"Yeah." I speared my lips with the cigarette and lit up. "How long's he been dead?"

"That's up to the M.E. Twelve hours anyway. He was a cold cut long before Tillet bought it."

"Which means what?"

He shook his head again. His coarse face was drawn in the light of the one lamp I had burning.

"My day rate's two-fifty," I said. "If you're talking about consulting."

"I'm talking about withholding evidence and obstruction of justice. The Murrow woman is getting to be important, and I think you know where she is."

I smoked and said nothing.

"It's this tingly feeling I get," he said. "Happens every time a case involves a woman and Amos Walker, too."

"Christ, John, all I did was order the chicken on a roll."

"I hope that's all you did. I sure hope."

We watched each other. Suddenly he seized the knob and pushed open the bedroom door, scooping his Police Special out of his belt holster.

I lunged forward, then held

back. The room was empty.

He went inside and looked out the open window and checked the closet and got down in pushup position to peer under the bed. Rising, he holstered the .38 and dusted his palms off against each other. "Perfume's stronger in here," he observed.

"I told you I was a heart-breaker."

"Make sure that's all you're breaking."

"Is this where you threaten to trash my license?"

"That's up to the state police," he said. "What I can do is tank you and link your name to that diner shoot for the reporters until little old ladies in Grosse Pointe won't trust you to walk their poodles."

On that chord he left me. John and I had been friendly a long time. But no matter how long you are something, you are not that something a lot longer.

So far I had two corpses and no Rena Murrow. It was time to punt. I dialed Great Lakes Importers, Paul Venito's legitimate front, but there was no answer. Well, it was way past closing time; in an orderly society even the crooks keep regular hours. I thawed something out for supper and watched an old Kirk Douglas film on television and turned in.

The next morning was misty gray with the bitter-metal smell of rain in the air. I broke out the foul-weather gear and drove to the Great Lakes building on East Grand River.

The reception area, kept behind glass like expensive cigars in a tobacco shop, was oval-shaped with passages spiking out from it, decorated in orange sherbet with a porcelain doll seated behind a curved desk. She wore a tight pink cashmere sweater and a black skirt slit to her ears.

"Amos Walker to see Mr. Venito," I said.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Venito's suffered a tragic accident." Her voice was honey over velvet. It would be.

"Who took his place?"

"That would be Mr. DeMarco. But he's very busy."

"I'll wait." I pulled a Thermos bottle full of hot coffee out of the slash pocket of my trench-coat and sat down on an orange couch across from her desk.

The porcelain doll lifted her telephone receiver and spoke into it. A few minutes later, two men in tailored blue suits came out of one of the passages and stood over me, and that was when the front crumbled.

"Position."

I wasn't sure which of them had spoken. They looked alike down to the scar tissue over their eyes. I screwed the top

back on the Thermos and stood and placed my palms against the wall. One of them kicked my feet apart and patted me down from tie to socks, removing my hat last and peering inside for atomic devices. I wasn't carrying. He replaced the hat.

"Okay, this way."

I accompanied them down the passage with a man on either side. We went through a door marked P. VENITO into an office the size of Hart Plaza with green wall-to-wall carpeting and one wall that was all glass, before which stood a tall man with a fringe of gray hair and a neat Vandyke beard. His suit was tan and clung like sunlight to his trim frame.

"Mr. Walker?" he said pleasantly. "I'm Fred DeMarco. I was Mr. Venito's associate. This is a terrible thing that's happened."

"More terrible for him than you," I said.

He cocked his head and frowned. "This office, you mean. It's just a room. Paul's father had it before him and someone will have it after me. I recognized your name from the news. Weren't you involved in the shooting of this Tillet person yesterday?"

I nodded. "If you call being a witness involved. But you don't have to call him 'this Tillet person.' He worked for you."

"He worked for Great Lakes

Importers, like me. I never knew him. The firm employs many people, many of whom I haven't had the pleasure of meeting."

"My information is he was killed because he was leaving Great Lakes and someone was afraid he'd peddle what he knew."

"We're a legitimate enterprise, Mr. Walker. We have nothing to hide. Tillet was let go. Our accounting department is handled by computers now, and he elected not to undergo retraining. Whatever he was involved with outside the firm that led to his death has nothing to do with Great Lakes."

"For someone who never met him you know a lot about Tillet," I said.

"I had his file pulled for the police."

"Isn't it kind of a big coincidence that your president and one of your bookkeepers should both be shot to death within a few hours of each other, and with the same caliber pistol?"

"The police were here again last night to ask that same question," DeMarco said. "My answer is the same. If, like Tillet, Paul had dangerous outside interests, they are hardly of concern here."

I got out a Winston and tapped it on the back of my hand. "You've been on the laundering end too long, Mr. DeMarco. You

think you've gotten away from playing hardball. Just because you can afford a tailor and a better barber doesn't mean you aren't still Freddy the Mark, who came up busting heads for Peter Venito in the bad old days."

One of the blue suits backhanded the cigarette out of my mouth as I was getting set to light it. "Mr. DeMarco doesn't allow smoking."

"That's enough, Andy." DeMarco's tone was even. "I was just a boy when Prohibition ended, Walker. Peter took me in and almost adopted me. I learned the business, and when I got back from the war and college, I showed him how to modernize, cut expenses and increase profits. For thirty years I practically ran the organization. Then Peter died and his son took over and I was back to running errands. But for the good of the firm I drew my pay and kept my mouth shut. We're legitimate now, and I mean for us to stay that way. I wouldn't jeopardize that for the likes of Dave Tillet."

"I think you would do just that. You remember a time when no one quit the organization, and when Tillet gave notice and you found out young Paul had arranged to buy his silence instead of making dead sure of it, you took Paul out of

the way and then slammed the door on Tillet."

"You're fishing, Walker."

"Why not? I've got Rena Morrow for bait."

The room got quiet. Outside the glass, fourteen floors down, traffic glided along Grand River with all the noise of fish swimming in an aquarium.

"She set up the meet with Tillet for Venito," I went on. "She can tie Paul to that diner at Eight Mile and Dequindre, and with a little work the cops will tie you to that trunk at Metro Airport. She can finger your two button men. Looking down the wrong end of life in Jackson, they'll talk."

"Get him out of here," DeMarco snarled.

The blue suits came toward me. I got out of there. I could use the smoke anyway.

I was closing my front door behind me when Rena came out of the bedroom. She had fixed her makeup since the last time I had seen her, but she had on the same navy suit and it was starting to look like a navy suit she had had on for two days.

I said, "You remembered to relock the door this time."

She nodded. "I stayed in a motel last night. The cops haven't got to them all yet. But I couldn't hang around. They get suspicious when you don't

have any luggage."

"You can't stay here. I just painted a bull's-eye on my back for Fred DeMarco." I told her what I'd told him.

"I can't identify the men who killed Dave," she protested.

"Freddy the Mark doesn't know that." I lifted the telephone. "I'm getting you a cab ride to police headquarters and then I'm calling the cops. Things are going to get interesting as soon as DeMarco gets over his mad."

The doorbell buzzed. This time I didn't have to tell her. She went into the bedroom and I got my Luger off the table and opened the door on a man who was a little shorter than I, with gray eyes like nickels on a pad. He had traded his Windbreaker for a brown leather jacket, but it looked like the same .22 target pistol in his right hand. Without the ski mask he looked about my age, with streaks of premature gray in his neat brown hair.

I waved the Luger and said, "Mine's bigger."

"Old movie line," he said with a sigh. "Take a gander behind you."

That was an old movie line, too. I didn't turn. Then someone gasped and I stepped back and moved my head just enough to get the corner of my eye working. A man a little taller than Gray Eyes, with black hair to



his collar and a handlebar mustache, stood behind Rena this side of the bedroom door with a squat .38 planted against her neck. His other hand was out of sight and the way Rena was standing said he had her left arm twisted behind her back. He too had ditched his Windbreaker and was in shirt-sleeves. The lighter caliber gun he had used on Tillet and probably on Paul Venito would be scrap by now.

It seemed I was the only one who needed a key to get into my house.

"Two beats one, Zorro." Gray Eyes' tone remained tired, and I figured out that was his normal voice. He stepped over the threshold and leaned the door shut. "Let's have the Heine." He held out his free hand.

"Uh-uh," I said. "I give it to you and then you shoot us."

"You don't, we shoot the girl first. Then you."

"You'll do that anyway. This way maybe I shoot you, too."

Mustache shifted his weight. Rena shrieked. My eyes flickered that way. Gray Eyes swept the barrel of the .22 across my face and grasped the end of the Luger. I fired. The report gulped up all the sound in the room. Mustache let go of Rena and swung the .38 my way. She knocked his arm up, and red flame streaked ceilingward. Rena dived for her blue bag on

the easy chair. Mustache aimed at her back. I swung the Luger, but Gray Eyes was still standing and fired the .22. Something plucked at my left bicep. The front window exploded then, and Mustache was lifted off his feet and flung backwards against the wall, his gun flying. The nasty cracking report followed an instant later.

I looked at Gray Eyes, but he was down now, his gun still in his hand but forgotten, both hands clasped over his abdomen with the blood dark between his fingers. I relieved him of the weapon and put it with the Luger on the table. Rena was half-reclining in the easy chair with her skirt hiked up over one leg and her .32 Remington in both hands pointing at Mustache dead on the floor. She hadn't fired.

"Walker?"

The voice was tinny and artificially loud. But I recognized it.

"We're all right, John," I called. "Put down that bullhorn and come in." I told Rena to drop the automatic. She obeyed, in a daze.

Alderdyce came in with his gun drawn and looked at the man still alive at his feet and across at the other man who wasn't and at Rena. I introduced them. "She didn't set up Tillet," I added. "Fred DeMarco bought the hit, not Venito. This

one will get around to telling you that if you stop gawking and call an ambulance before he's done bleeding into his belly."

"For you too, maybe." Alderdyce picked up the telephone.

He'd seen me grasping my left arm. "Just a crease," I said. "Like in the cowboy pictures."

"You're lucky. I know you, Walker. It's your style to set yourself up as the goat to smoke out a guy like DeMarco. I had men watching the place and had you tailed to and from Great Lakes. When the girl broke in, we loaded the neighborhood. Then these two showed—" He broke off and started speaking into the mouthpiece.

I said, "My timing was off. I'm glad yours was better."

The bearded black sergeant came in with some uniformed officers, one of whom carried a 30.06 rifle with a mounted scope. "Nice shooting," Alderdyce told him, hanging up. "What's your name?"

"Officer Carl Breen, lieutenant." He spelled it.

"Okay."

I let go of my arm and wiped the blood off my hand with my handkerchief and got out my wallet, counting out two hundred and fifty dollars, which I held out to Rena. "My day rate's two-fifty."

She was sitting up now, look-

ing at the money. "Why'd you ask for five hundred?"

"You had your mind made up about me. It saved a speech."

"Keep it. You earned it and a lot more than I can pay."

I folded the bills and stuck them inside the outer breast pocket of her navy jacket. "I'd just blow it on cigarettes and whisky."

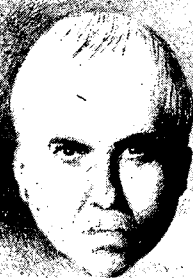
"Who's the broad?" demanded the sergeant.

I thought of telling him that's what a Dulcinea was, but the joke was old. We waited for the ambulance.

The surviving gunman's name was Richard Bledsoe. He had two priors in the Detroit area for ADW, one conviction, and after he was released from the hospital into custody he turned state's evidence and convicted Fred DeMarco on two counts of conspiracy to commit murder. DeMarco's appeal is still pending. The dead man went by Austin Grant and had done seven years in San Quentin for second-degree homicide knocked down from Murder One. The Detroit police worked a deal with the Justice Department and got Rena Murrow relocation and a new identity to shield her from DeMarco's friends. I never saw her again.

I never ate in Butch's diner again, either. These days you can't get in the place without a reservation.

FICTION



# DEATHDREAM

by Stephanie Kay Bendel



*Illustration by Richard Crist*

**E**very investigator has one case that haunts him. I'm no exception. I'll never forget the case of Helene Lawson.

It began one April morning. Janie, my secretary, poked her pretty head into my office and turned her big brown eyes on me. "There's a lady out here, Mr. Fine. She doesn't have an appointment, but she seems to be terribly upset. I think you'd better see her."

Helene Lawson was in her mid-forties. Although she tended to plumpness, she was still an attractive woman. High cheekbones and wide blue eyes gave her a patrician look that was complemented by her well-cut linen suit and carefully arranged blonde hair.

"How can I help you?" I asked after she sat down.

"Mr. Fine," she said softly, "my husband is going to kill me."

That was how she said it. Not "my husband *wants* to kill me," or "he's *trying* to kill me," but "he's *going* to kill me."

I shifted my weight in the huge leather chair I occupied. "Perhaps you'd better explain."

She glanced away for a moment, then picked an invisible piece of lint from her immaculate navy skirt. "Do you believe in precognitive dreams, Mr. Fine?"

"I've heard of such things," I said impassively. "Is that what this is about? You dreamed your husband was going to kill you, and now you're afraid the dream will come true?"

She nodded and tears formed in her eyes. As she opened her handbag and withdrew a lace handkerchief, I tried to form some judgment about Helene Lawson. Was she one of those impressionable women who seize upon a mere suggestion and accept it as gospel? Was she mentally unstable? Was she bored, fearful of approaching age, looking for some excitement and all too eager to dream up a murder plot against herself?

"I've been having the dream about once a week for nearly two months," she said when she'd finished dabbing at her eyes. "Charles—that's my husband—is trying to make me drink some orange juice. I don't want it. He gets angry and shouts at me. His face turns purple. He grabs me and tries to force the juice down my throat. I try not to drink it—I spit it out—but a little bit goes down and then I'm in terrible pain. I know I'm dying—" Her voice broke and she dabbed at the corners of her eyes again.

I considered. It didn't make much sense. If a man is trying to poison someone, he doesn't

usually force it down his victim's throat.

And lots of people have recurring dreams. But they don't necessarily come true.

"What makes you think this isn't just an ordinary dream?" I asked.

"I've had precognitive dreams ever since I was eight years old, Mr. Fine. I dreamed that my great-uncle was killed in a car accident and two weeks later, he was. It's happened many times since."

"But you have ordinary dreams as well, don't you? Ones that don't come true?"

"Yes, of course."

"And how do you know which ones will come true and which ones won't?"

"Oh, they're very different. The dreams that come true always deal with serious matters—deaths, illnesses, accidents—and they don't have the inconsistencies that ordinary dreams do. Do you know what I mean? For instance, the other night I had an ordinary dream. It was winter, and I was in a garden. Charles was there, too, but he was deep in thought and didn't see me. I was happy—terribly happy—for I knew he loved me very much. I looked down at my feet and saw there were pink roses—my favorite flowers—blooming in the snow. It sounds foolish, I

know, but everything seemed so—exactly right." She smiled at the memory, then grew solemn. "At any rate, *that* dream doesn't mean a thing."

"Why not?"

"Well, in the first place, it doesn't deal with a serious matter. And in the second, roses don't bloom in the winter, so it can't possibly come true."

I nodded and she went on. "Do you know why I came to see you today, Mr. Fine?"

I shook my head.

"Because I dreamed about you last night."

I was surprised. "I wasn't aware that we'd met before."

"We haven't, but I dreamed about you just the same."

I felt uneasy. Normally I can spot a nut or a con pretty quickly, but this woman didn't fit into any of my mental pigeonholes. If she was playing with a full deck, I didn't know the name of the game—or the rules. "Do you remember the details of that dream?" I asked, trying to sound offhand.

"Oh, yes. Everything was just the way it is here, even your door that says 'Benedict Fine—Confidential Investigations.' I wore this suit, sat in this chair. I was telling you about Charles's killing me. You were there, behind your desk, only—" She frowned. "I seem to remember a green stapler on

your desk. It isn't there yet."

I squirmed. There was a green stapler in the top right-hand drawer of my desk. I didn't tell her that, however, and I vowed I wouldn't take it out while she was there.

I said, "Aren't you confusing cause and effect? You dreamed that you wore that suit, so you *did* wear it. You dreamed that you came here, so you came here. Dreaming it didn't make it come true. *You did.*"

She smiled as one smiles at a child who cannot grasp a fundamental truth. "I came here dressed like this because that was what was destined to happen. I know from experience that there's no use in fighting it. Things will happen the way I dream them no matter what I do."

I renewed my vow to keep the stapler where it was. "Let's agree to disagree on that point," I said.

She gave me a look that displayed disappointment and frustration. "I know it's difficult to believe, but—oh! I remember! In my dream, while we were talking, the phone rang. As you spoke to the caller, you reached for something in your desk and a button popped off your cuff and rolled over there, by the window."

I relaxed. She was out of her depth now. In the first place,

Janie never puts calls through while I have a client in the office. Iron-clad rule. So the phone wasn't going to ring. Second, no matter what happened, I *wasn't* going to reach into that drawer and take out the green stapler. I'd wait her out. When she finally saw that her dream wasn't going to materialize, I'd reason with her. I'd refer her to Jason Birdwell, my psychiatrist friend, who'd probably label her obsessive-compulsive or even mildly paranoid.

I smiled. "Mrs. Lawson—"

The phone rang.

I stared at it as if it were going to bite. Helene Lawson smiled sadly. "You may as well pick it up. You'll have to, sooner or later."

I lifted the receiver. "Sorry, Mr. Fine," Janie said in her little girl voice. "Bailey said it was a matter of life and death."

Bailey is my best operative and if he says life and death, he means nothing less. "What's up?" I growled.

"Pete Ransom, that witness in the Turnbell case, has taken a powder, boss. I think I can catch up with him if you'll give me the address of his first wife—the one in Frisco."

I cursed under my breath as I reached for my address book. The Turnbell case was a big one, and I didn't want to see it go down the drain. When I

lifted the book from my desk drawer, my cuff button fell to the parquet floor and rolled over toward the window.

My lower jaw dropped. I probably would have sat there gaping like a baboon if Bailey's voice hadn't jolted me back. "Boss, I hate to push you, but I can just catch the plane to Frisco if you give me that address."

In a daze, I read it to him and hung up. Mrs. Lawson was looking pointedly at something on the top of my desk.

My heart did a double flip. The address book had been in the top right-hand drawer. Without thinking, I must have taken the stapler out and set it beside the phone, for there it sat, green, shining, and ominous.

Helene Lawson gave me another sad smile. "You really can't fight it. It's discouraging, I know, but you'll get used to it."

My head was whirling. If she had somehow set this all up, she'd have to have gotten to Bailey, and I didn't think he could be bought. Besides, even if he had agreed—for whatever reason—to make that call, how could she be sure of the stapler and the cuff button? It was too much to sort out.

"All right," I said tiredly. "Let's assume that you *do* have

certain dreams that always come true. You're telling me that your husband is going to kill you and there's nothing anyone can do about it."

She nodded.

"Then why are you here?"

Tears came again to her blue eyes, but her voice was surprisingly steady. "I shall die soon, Mr. Fine, and under the circumstances I have described. I'm resigned to that. What I want you to do—" her voice broke a little "—is find out *why*."

I raised an eyebrow, and she went on. "You see, we've had a good marriage. Over twenty years and never a serious quarrel. Charles has never given any indication of being unhappy with me, and I've not been unhappy with him. So *why* is he going to kill me?"

I made a mighty effort to sound businesslike. "Well, if I'm going to find out, I'll need some information from you."

"Yes?"

"What does your husband gain by your death?"

"Financially, you mean? Nothing. Charles is a self-made millionaire. He has plenty—and it's all in his name. Except for my personal jewelry, of course."

"Anything of extraordinary value there?"

She shook her head. "Besides, Charles knows that if he

wanted my jewelry, all he'd have to do is ask. I'd give him anything I have."

I made a note. "How about other women?"

She seemed amused. "Not Charles. He's comfortable only with a very regular routine. I can't imagine his doing anything that—stimulating."

Nevertheless, I made another note. Wives don't always know their husbands as well as they think.

"What about financial problems? Even millionaires get into a bind now and then."

She shook her head. "Charles makes a point of telling me how things are going with his business. And things have always gone well for him—he's gifted that way. I'm sure I'd know if anything had changed."

I was getting a little impatient. "I see. Your husband's really a perfect fellow. Outside of the fact that he's going to kill you, he has no faults."

She smiled at that. "Of course he's not *perfect*! But his faults are terribly minor."

"Tell me about them."

"There's only one thing, really. He's overprotective of me. Sometimes I feel he thinks I'm a child."

"Oh?"

"Yes. He flutters over me. 'Helene, wear a sweater. It's chilly tonight.' 'Darling, why

don't you take a nap? You look tired.'"

She smiled self-consciously. "Most of the time I don't mind. But sometimes it is annoying." She picked at another invisible piece of lint on her skirt. "But I don't see—I absolutely *don't* see—why he's going to kill me."

I looked over my notes. "You say that in your dream you don't swallow much of the orange juice and yet it kills you?"

"Yes. I'm sure I don't swallow more than a few drops. I spit most of it out, but immediately afterward I feel terrific pain, and I know I'm dying."

"What kind of pain?"

She frowned. "Oh, it's terrible! A crushing pain in the chest. I can't breathe."

"But you're in good health now?"

"Oh, yes. In fact, I had a complete physical only three weeks ago. Charles insisted."

"What did the doctor say, if I may ask?"

"That I was in very good health except that my blood pressure was elevated a bit. I wasn't surprised. I'd been having the dream for several weeks by then, and I was quite upset about it."

She waited until I'd finished writing that down. "He said the blood pressure wasn't seriously high. He gave me a prescription to lower it and—" she colored



“—he suggested I lose some weight.” She avoided looking at me. “I’ve always had difficulty losing weight. I’ve been trying for years.”

I asked whether she had the medicine with her. She did. I examined the vial, copied the name of the pharmacy, the prescription number, and the name of the medication, which was unfamiliar to me. The instructions said “One each morning.” I took one of the small white tablets and sealed it in a clean envelope.

I figured I’d take it to a chemist friend and check it out. At that point I had a half-formed idea that Mrs. Lawson had been told she had a serious health problem and, not being able to face it directly, she was unconsciously blaming her husband for her impending demise.

“One other thing,” I said. “There can’t be too many poisons so potent that a few drops will cause death immediately. And I’m sure such poisons aren’t easy to come by.”

She gave me a tired look. “Whatever the poison, Charles can get it. He owns a chain of pharmacies.”

“And you had your prescription filled in one of them?”

“Oh, no. You see, after I’d had the dream, I couldn’t bring myself to—well, the loss of trust is awful, Mr. Fine. At any rate, I

took the prescription to a drugstore on the other side of town. One where no one knows me.”

I could understand that. If I thought someone were trying to poison me, I wouldn’t want to swallow anything that came from him, even indirectly. Still—

“There’s nothing in your dream about pills, is there?”

“No. Part of the dream isn’t clear. It’s as if there’s more to it, but I can’t remember.” She looked at me sternly. “But don’t mistake me, Mr. Fine! I’m going to die, and it will be because of the orange juice my husband is going to force on me.”

I had an unsettled feeling after she left. I still wasn’t sure I believed her, but I couldn’t completely discount her story after what had happened in my office.

I called Jason Birdwell, the psychiatrist, and described Helene Lawson’s problem.

“Could be obsessive-compulsive or even mildly paranoid,” Jason said when I’d finished. “I’d have to examine her to make an accurate diagnosis.”

I didn’t have nerve enough to tell him about the phone call and the stapler and the cuff button. “Look, Jason,” I said, “let your imagination hang loose. Couldn’t there be some truth in what she says? Haven’t you ever heard of someone’s being

able to dream the future?"

I could practically see him shrug his shoulders at the other end of the line. "Sure. Along with monsters in Loch Ness and green men in flying saucers. But if you're talking about a scientifically documented case, uh-uh."

It was exactly what I'd expected him to say.

There is one person I know who almost never says what I expect, and I dialed his number next. Professor Alexander Chilton teaches physics at the local university. I met him at a cocktail party a couple of years ago, and we became good friends. More than once his unusual way of looking at things has helped me crack a case.

"I don't know much about dreams, Ben," he said after I'd outlined the problem.

"But you do know a lot about science. Is it possible to know something *before* it happens? Is there any scientific explanation?"

He chuckled. "You're putting a large order on a small plate. Science can't explain half the things we know to be true, let alone those things we're not sure of. But there are some indications—"

"Yes?"

"Well, we physicists have been battling problems with certain subatomic particles in recent years. So far, the best way

we've been able to explain their behavior is to theorize that they can travel backward in time."

I tried to digest that and couldn't. "What does that mean?"

He chuckled again. "It means that sometimes—for whatever reason—the effect comes *before* the cause."

Two days later, Orv Hiller, another of my operatives, gave me a report on Charles Lawson. "A regular whistling arrow, boss." Which is his peculiar way of saying that Lawson was super-clean and straight. No other women. No money troubles. He'd apparently made his fortune honestly, paid taxes to the satisfaction of the IRS, was truly devoted to his wife, and, amazingly, had no enemies.

"I'm not kidding, boss," Orv finished. "The worst thing anyone said about him is that he's kind of dull."

I called my chemist friend. "That pill I gave you, Don—have you analyzed it yet?"

"Oh, sure. No problem. It's hydrochlorothiazide."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Anything can be dangerous if you abuse it, even aspirin."

"But this isn't unusually potent or anything?"

"No. Millions of people use it every day."

"What's it prescribed for?"

"Hypertension, usually."

"You mean high blood pressure?"

"Right."

"Would this be prescribed for a serious case?"

"Not likely. Hydrochlorothiazide is usually given in mild cases. There are other, stronger medications for serious cases of hypertension."

"Okay, let's say a woman has a mild problem with her blood pressure and the doctor prescribes this stuff. Would he also tell her to lose weight?"

"Sure. If she's overweight."

I pictured Mrs. Lawson's figure. "Say fifteen pounds?"

"Oh, yeah. Blood pressure patients shouldn't carry any extra pounds. As a matter of fact, a lot of them can discontinue their medication once they normalize their weight."

Not long after that conversation, Mrs. Lawson showed up again. She looked tired and pale as she settled into a chair.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Charles found out about the blood pressure medicine."

"Was he upset because you had it filled at a rival pharmacy?"

"Oh no. I told him that I knew if one of his pharmacists filled it, he'd find out about it and I

didn't want to worry him. He was nice about that—said it was thoughtful of me."

I was puzzled. "So what's the problem?"

She drew a deep breath. "Charles says that if I take that medicine, I absolutely must drink a glass of orange juice every day." Her voice trailed away.

I remembered the sinking feeling I'd had when I saw the stapler on my desk. I could imagine how she felt. This business of seeing the future wasn't easy to get used to.

"But your doctor didn't recommend the juice?"

She shook her head.

I called Don back while she waited. "That prescription we were discussing," I said. "Is there any reason to tell the patient to take orange juice with it?"

"Oh, sure. That's standard procedure."

"Why?"

"Well, hydrochlorothiazide's a diuretic. Makes you pee a lot. It acts by removing excess sodium from the system. Unfortunately, it also takes out a lot of potassium, which you don't want to remove. Drinking the orange juice replaces the potassium."

"I see. Will anything else work?"

"Bananas are just as good."

They're loaded with potassium, too."

"And what happens if you get low on potassium?"

"You get light-headed, have muscle tremors. Could even faint if you exerted yourself."

"But if you drink orange juice every day?"

"No problem. I told you, millions of people take this stuff."

"Why didn't her doctor tell her to drink the juice?"

"He should have. Maybe he was busy. Or maybe he did and she forgot. At any rate, the pharmacist should have put a warning label on the bottle."

"There wasn't one."

He clicked his tongue. "Incompetence abounds."

I hung up the phone and turned to Mrs. Lawson. "Your husband is leveling with you. You should drink the juice. Or eat a banana every day."

She shook her head sadly. "I'm allergic to bananas."

"You *should* drink the juice, then," I said softly, feeling like a doomsayer.

"I know I should. And I know there's no use in resisting the inevitable. But it goes against the grain to put one's head into the noose without some struggle, Mr. Fine."

"What will you do?"

She paused. "I shall drink canned orange juice. It doesn't taste as good, but I can open a

fresh can myself each morning, pour myself a glass, and throw away the rest. That way, I'll know it hasn't been tampered with."

It sounded foolproof to me. "What'll your husband say about this odd behavior?"

She actually smiled. "Nothing. Charles would never comment on one's eccentricities. He's far too polite."

I said I'd like to meet this polite fellow. Could she think of a plausible way to introduce us? She said she'd work on it.

A couple of days later, she called. "If you're willing to pose as an interior decorator, you could spend this weekend with us. I told Charles I'm thinking of redoing the house. I convinced him that the best way to go about it is to have the decorator stay with us for a couple of days to see how we live."

"Ingenious! If you ever want a job working for me, say the word."

"If I were going to be around much longer, Mr. Fine, I'd take you up on that."

I was fully prepared to dislike Charles Lawson. I couldn't. The rotund little man with the balding head and wispy white mustache was a genuinely nice guy. A little dull, true, but definitely likable. I'm a pretty good judge of charac-

ter, and after an hour of listening to him talk happily about his business, I knew he was never going to kill his wife or anyone else.

Helene Lawson, on the other hand, disturbed me. Her appearance was awful. Her complexion was gray and pasty. There were dark circles beneath her eyes. And more than once that Saturday I noticed that her hands were unsteady. I even found myself asking her whether she'd had her orange juice that morning.

"Oh, God! Not you, too!" she snapped at me, her blue eyes blazing. Then she was instantly contrite. "I'm sorry. It's just that Charles keeps on at me about the juice, too. I *do* drink it. A full glass every morning, just like I'm supposed to. I wish I never had to look at a glass of orange juice again!"

I realized that if I were sitting around waiting for someone to poison me, I'd feel the same way. Her appearance still troubled me, however. She looked unwell.

"You didn't eat very much at dinner tonight," I said.

She grimaced. "I'm trying awfully hard to lose weight. The doctor said that if I lost fifteen pounds there was a good chance my blood pressure would normalize and I wouldn't have to take any medicine—or or-

ange juice." She shook her head. "I don't even know why I'm doing this. I guess part of me wants to believe there's a way out—even when I *know* there isn't."

"Have you lost any weight?"

She frowned in disgust. "Only three pounds. I've been starving and exercising and trying everything else."

"Three pounds is pretty good," I said encouragingly.

"It's been torture. And the worst of it is, my blood pressure is going higher. I got a sphygmo—you know, one of those things so I can check it myself to see whether there is any improvement. But it keeps getting *worse*. And the blood pressure medicine isn't working as well as it used to."

I thought to myself that it was no wonder, what with the stress she was under.

Her manner toward me that Saturday was at least as friendly as before, although strained by the pretense that I was a decorator. Not knowing what Charles's decorating knowledge encompassed, I confined myself to phrases like *neutral tones* and *ambiance* and *functional pieces*. Helene helped me out by throwing in *monochromatic schemes* and *eclectic groupings*.

On Sunday morning at breakfast, I detected an abrupt

change in her attitude toward me. She downed a small glass of orange juice with a defiant glance toward Charles and studiously avoided picking up the conversational tidbits I tossed out. Finally, on the pretense of discussing window treatments, I got her alone.

"What's wrong?"

"The dream has changed."

"You mean it *can* change?"

"Well, not *changed* exactly. Do you remember I told you there was more, but I couldn't recall it?"

"Yes."

"Well, now I do. Last night it was perfectly clear."

"What was?"

"You were in my dream. And you were helping Charles to kill me."

"What?"

"Yes, you were there. Charles was angry, shouting at me, insisting I drink the juice. His face was purple and the blood vessel in his temple was throbbing as he tried to force the juice down my throat. I kept trying to spit it out." She turned to me with fire in her eyes. "And you were holding me down! You said, 'You *must* drink it, Helene. It'll be all right.'"

Her anger drained away and was replaced by a great sadness. "Why, Mr. Fine? I know you have nothing against me. Why are you doing this?"

As I was not yet doing it, and could not even imagine doing what she described, I had no answer. I swallowed. There was only one thing to do.

"Mrs. Lawson, I am leaving immediately. I shall never see you again. If you like, I'll refer your investigation to a trusted colleague."

She gave me a soulful look. Her eyes were bright with moisture. "I'm sorry for saying those things. You're as much a victim of destiny as I am. And you can't escape the future by running. None of us can."

But I could try. I went directly up to the room I had occupied and tossed my things into my bag. On my way down the stairs, I met Charles.

"I'm sorry," I said. "Something's come up and I must leave at once."

He looked genuinely disappointed. "Say, that's too bad. I enjoyed having you, and so did Helene. I was hoping you'd at least stay for dinner. Pick up her spirits a bit." His face clouded. "I'm worried about her, you know. There's something awfully wrong. I know it. But even her doctor says she's fine and he gave her a complete physical a couple of weeks ago."

He was turning to me, a stranger, imploring me with his eyes to help the woman he loved. I felt trapped.

"I'm sorry. I must leave," I said quickly as I tried to hurry past him.

But I was not quick enough. Helene Lawson appeared at the foot of the staircase, her entire body trembling. Perspiration trickled down her cheeks although the morning was still cool. "Charles?" she said weakly. Then she collapsed.

Charles scrambled down the stairs, panting with anxiety. "Quickly, Mr. Fine! Help me get her to the sofa!"

I felt like a fly tentatively stepping onto the spider's web. "Please!" he begged.

The two of us propped her on the sofa. She seemed dazed. Charles felt for her pulse. "My God!" he exclaimed. "She's in shock! Call a doctor!"

Helene shook her head. "No, I'll be all right. It's the diet pills. They make me a little trembly sometimes."

Charles's face darkened suddenly. "Diet pills? Helene, you're not taking that garbage again?"

She wiped the perspiration from her forehead with the back of her hand. "It's only the over-the-counter kind," she said weakly. "They're safe. The package says so."

I edged toward the front door. "The package also says that you shouldn't take diet pills if you have blood pressure problems," Charles scolded. "They

make your blood pressure worse."

"But I have medicine to take care of the blood pressure . . ."

From the doorway I frowned. "Yesterday you told me the blood pressure medicine wasn't working any more."

"It still works," she panted. "Just have to take more . . ."

Revelation dawned in Charles's face. "My God! I should have realized! Potassium deficiency!"

I hesitated at the door. Was there going to be an answer to this thing after all?

"But I drink my orange juice every morning," Helene persisted, her voice weakening even more.

Charles's face grew purple. "But perhaps not enough of it, Helene! After all, you're only supposed to take one blood pressure pill a day. How many did you take this morning?"

She could barely hold her head up. "Don't know," she mumbled. "Five? Six?"

"What's going on?" I asked Charles.

He looked up at me. "Hypokalemia. Severe potassium depletion. We have to hurry! Quickly, get some orange juice from the kitchen!"

I hesitated, knowing how Helene was going to react. "Isn't there something else? A banana, maybe?"

"No. She's allergic. Besides, the juice will get potassium into the bloodstream faster. *Hurry, man!*"

While Charles was on the phone, summoning the paramedics, I groped in the kitchen drawers for a can opener. "Look, Helene," I exclaimed, carrying an unopened can and a plastic tumbler into the living room. "I'm opening this can right now. There's nothing to be afraid of. It's all right to drink it." But I didn't think she heard me. Her eyes were closed, and her breath was coming in irregular little gasps.

Charles, irritated by my slowness, grabbed the can from me, opened it, and slopped the liquid into the tumbler. "For God's sake, drink this, Helene!"

Mrs. Lawson opened her eyes just in time to see him shove the glass toward her mouth.

"*No!*" she screamed. Her eyes were riveted on the tumbler as if it were a deadly cobra.

"Darling, you *must*—"

She tried to push the glass away. "*No! No! No!*"

Charles strained to keep the juice from spilling. As if in a trance, I watched the little blood vessel in his left temple pulsate with his exertion.

"Help me, Fine. She's hysterical. Hold her down. We haven't much time."

Her eyes widened in horror

as I approached. I grasped her arms and tried to make my voice sound reassuring. "You *must* drink it, Helene. It'll be all right."

As soon as the words escaped my lips, I knew how Peter felt when the cock crowed. The look she gave me, the look of terror, of knowing one has been utterly betrayed, will haunt me forever.

Charles was trying to force the liquid through her clamped teeth. What little trickled into her mouth, she spat out at me. Then, just as the paramedics arrived, she moaned and clutched her chest. The two young men ordered us to step back as they commended their efficient ministrations.

"What's happening?" I asked Charles.

"Heart attack," he said brokenly.

"But how?" I frowned. "Not the potassium deficiency? I thought that gave one muscle tremors."

"The heart is a muscle," he said.

Helene Lawson died on the way to the hospital.

There was one other strange thing about the Lawson case. I attended the funeral and afterward the burial service, which was held in Greenview Gardens



Cemetery. Although it was the first week in May, a freak snow-shower had whitened the ground. The rich mahogany casket rested on a bier beneath a green canopy. I stood a little distance away from Charles Lawson because I felt guilty. He still thought I was an interior decorator.

I also felt guilty for having failed Helene, although I didn't see what else I could have done.

The funeral attendants began removing flowers from the back of the hearse and draping them over the casket. There were several large sprays—all of them pink roses. Her favorite flowers. There were so many sprays, in fact, that they had to place the last three on the

ground beside the bier—in the snow.

*Pink roses in the snow.*

I suddenly remembered the other dream she'd described to me. The impossible one. The one about being in a garden in the snow and Charles's not seeing her there. What else had she said?

*I was happy—terribly happy—for I knew that he loved me very much.*

I turned and walked back to my car with the odd feeling that there was, in spite of everything, some kind of sense in what had happened.

Wherever Helene Lawson was now, she knew at last that Charles had never stopped loving her.

I shall always believe that.

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## **SOLUTION TO THE APRIL "UNSOLVED":**

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December was the month of Hubert's first watch.

FICTION

# Leonardo, Prefect of Verona

by Curt Fischer



*Illustration by Judy Mitchell*

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“Signor Montague,” began Leonardo, Prefect of Police for the city of Verona, “I respect your losses the past few days of your aunt, your cousin Romeo, and your friend Mercutio, but Prince Escalus has asked that I make an official inquiry into this entire matter, so, if I might be so blunt, if you tell me the same tale that you have uttered the last two times that I have given you the opportunity, I will be forced to begin breaking your fingers.”

Shock crossed the features of Benvolio Montague. For the first time since Leonardo’s men had politely requested that he come to Old Freetown, the local courthouse, he became aware that this was more than a simple inquest.

“Signor Leonardo . . .”

“Prefect Leonardo,” interrupted Leonardo, wishing to make it plain that he was acting in an official capacity and was in no mood to be kind.

“Prefect Leonardo,” Benvolio began once more, “whatever is the problem? Am I under some kind of suspicion? Suspicion of what?”

“Very well, Signor Montague, play the fool, but perhaps if I were to tell you that I have received the final report of Prefect Salerno of Mantua concerning his findings in this matter at his end, it might persuade you to be less reluctant to share the truth,” said Leonardo as he picked up Benvolio’s hand and examined each digit.

“Prefect Salerno?”

“Of Mantua.” Leonardo allowed the significance of the location to penetrate. Noting Benvolio’s continued reticence, Leonardo gave Benvolio’s little finger a slight twist and then dropped the hand unceremoniously. Benvolio was careful not to show any emotion other than disdain.

“Perhaps I should share with you what I surmise the truth to be?” suggested Leonardo as he strolled across the echoing chamber and seated himself upon a high-backed chair emblazoned with his seal of office.

“I suppose,” Benvolio finally said, after considering his situation, “that you will tell me of your wild conclusions regardless of whether or not I request you to do so.”

Leonardo nodded. “Yes, you are probably correct.” He paused for dramatic effect. “Where should I begin?”

“Where should you begin? You are asking me, signor . . . Prefect Leonardo? I should wish that you would begin with what I am being accused of.”

"Ah, true. I have been remiss." He arose and slowly walked over to Benvolio's chair without looking at him. When he was directly in front of him, he leaned forward until his nose was only inches from Benvolio's. "I am intending to charge you with the murders of Mercutio, cousin to the prince, and Tybalt Capulet, cousin to the late Signorina Juliet Capulet . . . or should I say, Signora Montague, since we now know that she was married to your late cousin Romeo?"

"Murder?" Benvolio said weakly and incredulously. Then he exclaimed with more vigor, "Mercutio and Tybalt! Are you insane? Mercutio was killed on a public street by Tybalt, and Tybalt was likewise dispatched by Romeo!"

"Yes, on a public street. Yet no one other than you witnessed the events. No one alive that is. Convenient, no?"

"But why would I . . ." Benvolio began to sputter. "What kind of a monster do you wish to make of me?"

"A green one, Signor Montague. A green one," intoned Leonardo in a mysterious fashion as he watched Benvolio's eyes carefully.

With Leonardo's odd comment, Benvolio lapsed into a stupefied silence while Leonardo continued the interrogation which he hoped would substantiate his version of the events leading to the two most celebrated deaths in the history of his town.

"Do you recall Il Duce Mercutio's last request, Signor Montague?"

"His . . . last request?" replied Benvolio, still in a stupor.

"Yes, his last request. Remember?"

Benvolio dropped his head and stared at his slim ankles, then he cocked his head only enough to see Leonardo and said, "He made no last request. He cursed both the Montagues and the Capulets—a plague on both their houses—something like that, and he scolded Romeo for coming between himself and Tybalt, since he had been pierced by Tybalt's rapier while screened by Romeo, but there was no re—"

"Think harder!" demanded Leonardo.

Benvolio looked away from Leonardo's face again to contemplate the cracks in the ancient tile floor. "Except for saying that his wound did not appear to be deep or serious, yet that it would be sufficient to cause his death, he said or requested nothing else," he said without moving his head.

"Hmmp," Leonardo snorted. "Did he not tell his page to get someone, almost immediately upon his being injured?"

"His page?" Suddenly Benvolio blanched. "A surgeon," he said

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softly, "Mercutio asked his page to fetch a surgeon."

"Oh, so you do remember."

Benvolio sat back and, his color returning, braved Leonardo's fierce countenance. "I do not see what difference that makes; the doctor did not arrive in time."

"True, young Mercutio died in your arms, as you faithfully reported to Romeo and to the prince, but the doctor did arrive, shortly after you left Mercutio's side." Leonardo halted long enough to watch Benvolio's discomfort.

"So? Mercutio was truly dead, was he not?" Benvolio asked. "Is that the charge, that I left Mercutio while he still lived? I could have sworn that he was . . ."

"I'm sure you could have sworn that he was dead, since you had taken steps to guarantee it," interrupted Leonardo. Making frequent interruptions during a suspect's responses was a favorite device of Leonardo's, since it made it difficult for the liar to stick with a fabrication.

"Guaran . . . how had I guaranteed it?"

Leonardo did not answer, but turned instead and sat down on a footstool a few feet in front of Benvolio. "Was it the same with Tybalt? Was he dead when you encouraged Romeo to flee before the townspeople came, or did you assist him to the afterlife before they arrived?"

Benvolio's jaw dropped, leaving his mouth gaping stupidly.

"The surgeon who administered to royal Mercutio noticed a discoloration around the wound. His curiosity led him to Tybalt's body, where he saw the same discoloration." Leonardo took a deep breath, something between a sigh and a yawn. "It is his opinion that the discoloration was caused by the introduction of a poison to the wound. It is also his opinion that Mercutio was wrong about his injury; that, in fact, with minor treatment and rest, he could have recovered."

Benvolio continued his silence, but he was now busy chewing the inside of his lower lip.

Leonardo was holding up a paper with some bold script on it. "Prefect Salerno's report was most confusing. You see, Signor Montague, when Prefect Salerno questioned the apothecary who sold Signor Romeo Montague the poison with which he dispatched himself, the apothecary was at first hesitant to admit having sold anything, since Mantua's law is quite severe in such matters. However, when Prefect Salerno assured him that there would be no

price extracted for his indiscretion, he was very willing to talk. It was what he said that confused us. He admitted selling poison to Signor Montague, but not on the day in question, the day Signor Romeo died. Fortunately, Prefect Salerno is a man after my own heart. He saw the answer. Do you see the answer, Signor Benvolio?"

Benvolio said nothing.

"There were two Signor Montagues, one who identified himself as such—you, Signor Benvolio—and one who did not—Signor Romeo—some days later. That is why the apothecary knew the name but disputed the date. What do you say to this, Signor Montague?"

The look on Benvolio's face failed to betray the inner turmoil he was feeling. He refused to give in to Leonardo. "I say," he said after a small sigh, "that you can prove none of this. I say that you have no motive for my killing my friend or indirectly causing the death of my cousin or anyone else. I say that you have been pressured to uncover a murderer who does not exist, and that you have chosen me to be your victim. Perhaps it is time to begin breaking my fingers, Prefect Leonardo. After all, that is the only way you will get me to confess to a lie."

"I see that you continue to protest your innocence, Signor Benvolio. I can bring the apothecary from Mantua to identify you, you know."

"It was for rats. I purchased poison from him, that I admit, but it was to kill rats down around our orchards," Benvolio blurted out, with a hint of desperation in his voice.

"Why go to Mantua? We have apothecary shops here in Verona!"

"I just happened to be in Mantua when I thought of it."

"Oh, Signor Montague, that is such a silly contention. We know exactly when you made your purchase. You must have ridden all night to get to Mantua and back, for you bought your vial of death the night following the Capulet party, yet you were back in Verona the next morning."

"I was with Mercutio that whole night."

"Mercutio was so intoxicated after the party at the Capulets that he would never have missed you. Besides, he is no longer here to establish your alibi, is he?"

"But why? Why? That is the one question you have not answered. Why would I do such a thing? Mercutio was my friend. Why would I kill him?"

"Because he was Romeo's *best* friend."

"So?"

"So, you knew how Romeo would react when he heard that his best friend was dead. You knew that he would respond with vengeance. You originally bought the poison with the idea of killing Romeo directly, but, with Mercutio in your arms, injured, you saw a different opportunity. All you needed to do was ensure Signor Mercutio's death, and either Tybalt or the prince, since he had decreed the death penalty for anyone fighting in the streets, would take care of Romeo for you. That's why you put a few drops of the deadly potion on Tybalt's wound; you were attempting to further infuriate the prince. Had not Signor Romeo's father been present to plead with the prince, your plan might have succeeded."

"Insane! Your deductions are insane! You still have not told me why I would do such a thing. You say it was Romeo, my cousin, whom I was ultimately trying to destroy. Why?"

Leonardo paced the length of the chamber in which they had spent the last half hour together. "Motive? That, after the surgeon's and Prefect Salerno's report, was the one thing that had me at a loss. Then it came to me. Why would a man ride all night to purchase poison that was available right here in Verona? What could have happened that made obtaining such a vehicle of death so immediately important that it could not wait? It was only after I was sure it was Romeo that you were after that I could make sense of it all, for then the night you went to Mantua tells me your motive."

"Go on, amuse me with your tales," sneered Benvolio.

"The needless poisoning of Tybalt gave me a further key. Even if the prince did nothing to Signor Romeo, you felt that Tybalt's death might accomplish something just as valuable: it might incur the wrath of Signorina Juliet, since bold Tybalt was her favorite cousin. Do you follow me now, Signor Montague?"

Benvolio nodded slowly. "You are saying that I wished to break up my cousin's affair with Signorina Capulet. You amaze me, prefect, I had thought you might come up with a much more convincing theory. However, I must congratulate you, you had me very frightened. I actually took you seriously for some time."

"Ah, but you did have an untold love for the young lady, did you not?"

Benvolio gave a short, but insincere, laugh, "No, prefect, I did not."

"Then why that night?"

"Pardon, prefect?"

"Then why that night? What angered you enough to make you ride to Mantua to purchase poison that night, the night of the Capulet party?"

Benvolio held his tongue.

"The day of the party, did Signor Romeo not confess to you that his affair with a young woman named Rosaline was not going well?"

Benvolio considered for a moment, then nodded assent.

"And was it not you who insisted that if he would crash the Capulet party with you, you would show him a number of young ladies who would rescue him from his depression?"

"Yes, but what does . . ."

"This was a masked ball, I believe?"

"Yes, but I still . . ."

"So you were all scattered around the ballroom, unidentifiable in your masks, only your voices to betray you, as (Signor Capulet has informed me) Signor Romeo was betrayed when Signor Tybalt overheard him remarking aloud about Signorina Juliet. Is this not also true?"

Benvolio hesitated, but answered, "Yes, perhaps, but . . ."

"You overheard that remark as well, then?"

Benvolio reacted as if he had been pricked by a needle. "What? What remark?"

"Signor Romeo's remark about the late Signorina Juliet. You heard it, too, then, did you not? How else would you know to which remark of Romeo's I refer?"

Benvolio's eyes darted left and right like a caged animal's. "Yes. Yes, I overheard Romeo talking of Juliet. What of it?"

"It must have galled you."

"What must have galled me?"

"To have taken Signor Romeo to the Capulet party so he might find a new love interest, only to have him pick the one young lady that you had loved from afar for some time."

"For some time? She was only thirteen . . ."

"Thirteen years old? Yes, but sophisticated beyond her years, no?"

Benvolio became less belligerent and more introspective. "Yes. Yes."

"And beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Did you go to the Capulet Monument two mornings ago?" asked



Leonardo, and then, before Benvolio could respond, "No, I don't think I saw you there. You were fortunate. It was a gory scene. Paris dead, Romeo dead, and Juliet . . ." He shook his head, keeping his eyes on Benvolio's face. "Juliet was the worst. You've probably heard. She had taken Signor Romeo's knife from its scabbard and had used it to rip open . . ."

"Enough! Enough," pleaded Benvolio as he broke into tears. "It wasn't supposed to work that way. I only wanted Romeo out of the way!" For some time he was unable to speak as he burst into uncontrolled weeping. As quickly as they began, his tears suddenly stopped, and he spoke with a quivering voice, "Did you know that I was not even going to have a chance after Romeo was eliminated? Paris, the prince's cousin, had received Signor Capulet's permission to marry her."

"Yes, I know that," Leonardo replied.

"You must believe me when I tell you that my poisoning of Mercutio was done impulsively. I would never have harmed him had I been thinking properly."

"I believe you. It makes sense."

"There must have a number of things that I was not thinking about." Benvolio was calm now, the battle over. "For example, how could I have been so stupid as to have given the apothecary in Mantua my name?"

"Oh, that," said Leonardo softly. He relaxed his harsh exterior. His facial expression and voice became almost fatherly and sympathetic. "It was like my threat to break your fingers, Signor Benvolio. I lied."

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# **The Meanest Man** by Arthur Train



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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**E**ver since old Doc Barrows had swindled the Somerset County agriculturists by selling them worthless bonds, and Squire Hezekiah Mason, the then local prosecutor, in spite of the fact that Doc was known to be a harmless old nut, had insisted on sending him to Sing Sing for so doing, his widowed daughter, Ma Best, had been paying back her father's victims little by little—all except Mason himself, and to him, at his own suggestion, she had given a mortgage on the Phoenix Hotel for twice the amount involved. Doc had been sixty years old when Mason had sent him up—a cheery old soak with an insane glitter in his watery eye whenever the conversation touched upon diamond mines, gushers, or the wonderful way you could distill gold out of sea water—"Seen 'em do it myself, I tell ye!" He had staggered out of prison ten years later, the glitter gone, a broken old man, rambling until he died about the days when he had been on intimate terms with "the Morgins," "the Rockfellers," and "Johnny W. Gates."

In the sixteen years which had elapsed since Doc's conviction, Ma, now a woman in the fifties, had wiped out the major part of his indebtedness.

There was a certain justice in the voluntarily assumed obligation, for part of the Phoenix Hotel had originally been built out of Doc's ill-gotten gains, and Ma continued to run it for the benefit of those whom he had defrauded, most of them people of small means. She would have wiped out all of it had she not been paying double interest to Mason.

The loss of the five thousand dollars which Doc had enticed from the horny clutch of this country Shylock had cruelly hurt the latter's pride. He still had the bonds—beautiful pink securities engraved with the effigies of Indians chasing herds of buffaloes off prairie railroad tracks in order, apparently, to enable them to escape the onward rush of a locomotive with a cuspidor-shaped smoke-stack—gold refunding general-mortgage bonds, bearing eight per cent, and not due until 1967! He had bought them from Doc at 89%, under the impression that the latter, being a mental defective, did not know what they were worth, only to find a few months later that no such bonds had ever been issued. Doc, who had put the money, meantime, into the second floor of the hotel, insisted that the railroad's assertion was sheer nonsense.

"Morgin handed me those bonds himself, he did! 'Doc,' he says, 'you kin just put 'em away and fergit about 'em, an' you'll have

sumpthin' to fall back on in your old age,' he says. 'They'll sell at 200 some day, Doc,' he says. . . . How kin you tell they won't, Mr. Mason?"

"What did you give Mr. Morgan for 'em?" demanded Mason, with his eye on the jury, which half an hour later found Doc guilty.

"I give him a half interest in my patent."

"What patent?"

"My sea-water patent fer makin' gold."

And the jury had convicted Doc under the common misapprehension that such was their duty if he owed the complainant money.

That evening the prosecutor had called upon Ma Best in the kitchen of the Phoenix Hotel.

"Judge Tompkins is going to sentence your father tomorrow morning, Mrs. Best," he said with an ominous ring in his gritty voice. "What I say will have consid'r'ble influence. As you know, your dad was convicted for stealin' two thousand dollars from Toggery Bill Gookin by falsely representing them bonds to be legal obligations of the corporation issuin' the same. He kin get anywhere from one to ten years. There's another indictment chargin' him with stealin' five thousand dollars from me. I kin have it tried or not ez I see fit. But I guess your dad kin get punished all that's necessary in Toggery's case. Now my money went into the hotel, so why not give me a mortgage on it? Ten thousand dollars would be about right, I guess. I figure I lost more'n that. You see the bonds was worth two hundred, accordin' to what your dad told me, and I have five of 'em. That in itself makes ten thousand. And then there's loss of interest, and expenses, and what I might 'a' made in something else if I'd kept my money. I don't see why Tompkins needs to be so awful hard on Doc, in view of his condition, 'specially if—"

He got the mortgage; Doc got ten years. And Ma had been paying the squire eight hundred dollars annually for sixteen years—a total of twelve thousand eight hundred—and still owed Mason the principal of ten thousand.

"All the same, Father did get five thousand dollars from him," Ma had protested to Sheriff Moses Higgins in defense of her action, when he had expostulated with her.

"I wish Doc had taken all he had, durn his soul!" returned Moses indignantly.

That was also the way all the inhabitants of Pottsville felt about it, for there was no more unpopular man in the whole upper tier

of New York counties than Squire—"Stinker"—Hezekiah Mason, whose mortgage on the Phoenix Hotel was but one in his sheaf of nearly a hundred that covered the farms of Somerset County.

For ten years Ma had worked herself to the bone trying to make enough profit out of the precarious transient business to pay the squire his usurious interest and have something left for more deserving sufferers. But the roads were bad, trade was light, and the only really good season was while the county fair was on in the autumn, the winter term of court, and during the trout season in the spring, when Lawyer Ephraim Tutt, and a few other sapient ones, hied themselves to the Mohawk Valley to whip the whirling waters of Chasm Brook or the quieter inlet of Turkey Pond.

At that time the Phoenix, although famous for its cooking, was known as a three-dollar house—namely, room, a dollar-fifty; dinner, a dollar; supper, seventy-five cents; breakfast, fifty. Thus, if you took board by the day you saved a whole seventy-five cents! There was electric light, but no running water in the rooms; the beds had wooden slats, and towels were changed only on demand. Ma cooked the meals, her small daughter Betty waited on the table, assisted at first by one Willie Toothacher, and later, after his translation to the law office of Mr. Tutt, by a miscellaneous Negro boy named Ulysses, and the upstairs work "got done somehow,"—a hand-to-mouth enterprise which paid its way because expenses were reduced to a minimum and there were no bad debts. In fine, during those first ten years Ma Best ran the Phoenix Hotel for the benefit of Squire Mason, who cracked the lash of labor over her back and took ninety-five percent of the profits.

And then the motor brought prosperity with a gigantic P to Pottsville and the Phoenix Hotel. Where the eye of the traveler had originally been met only by a sign in faded lettering above the pillars of a sagging piazza and rickety porte-cochère, now swung the creaking silhouette of a flamingo-colored bird in full flight—rivaling in size the fabled roc—and alleged by the artist, Cy Pennypacker, of the Art Foto Saloon, to be an accurate representation of a phoenix arising from its ashes. The pillars gained self-respect and stood erect. Bright blue replaced the weatherworn white of the façade. And Ulysses, arrayed in a uniform of smart green with pillbox cap of the same, lolled superciliously beneath the porte-cochère to open the doors of the line of waiting motors and pass the occupants on to the headwaiter—erstwhile Deputy Sheriff Sam Bellows, who stood in white ducks beside the door and

waved the motorists into the dining room at two-fifty per head.

The Perfect Tour had put Pottsville on the map, and the Phoenix, by virtue of its vermilion and blue trappings, became a palace hotel. For three miles in both directions up and down the valley the appetite of the approaching motorist was titillated by similar scarlet phoenixes suspended at intervals above the roadway, each bearing a single magic word. From these signs, taken tandem, successively, *in toto*, en masse and ensemble, the wayfarer, provided his eyesight was unimpaired by the strident color, would be gradually educated in crescendo to the gastronomical possibilities awaiting him in Pottsville.

#### EAT AT THE PHOENIX HOTEL

Pottsville, Famous for its Chicken and Lobster Dinners.

Fresh Corn—Beans—Peas—Cider—Waffles—Flapjacks.

Every MODERN CONVENIENCE, hot baths.

Golf—Tennis—Hunting—Fishing.

EAT—EAT—EAT AT THE PHOENIX HOTEL.

Ma admitted that the references to sport were slightly exaggerated, and that the final *s* on the word "baths" was nearly a fib, but she said she reckoned if folks wanted to hunt and play golluf there wasn't anything to stop 'em, and anybody who wanted to pay for the privilege could take plural baths instead of one.

Anyhow, the point is that they came, joyously leaving two-fifty per behind them and cramming the white-gloved palms of Sam Bellows and Ulysses with silver quarters and half dollars; and many of them stayed overnight and bought picture postals, and nut sundaes, and the genuine Indian moccasins and curios which Ma ordered from New York and sold in the hotel lobby, and crowded into the Pottsville Palace cinema, and "just loved being in the country—I mean the real country!"

So Ma replaced the slats with box springs and put up her prices—room, six-fifty; dinner, two-fifty; supper, two-fifty; breakfast, one-fifty; garage, two-fifty. The Phoenix became a twelve-dollar-a-day house, and the citizens of Pottsville pointed with pride to Ma's new filling station, with its green lattice covered with artificial crimson ramblers and its row of scarlet and blue pumps.

"I only wish Dad could ha' lived to see this day!" she sighed frequently as the money kept on pouring into her lap. "There's

more gold in oil than in sea water!"

Her success was wormwood to Squire Mason's soul, since he regarded the hotel as by rights belonging to him. He'd paid for most of it, hadn't he? He ground his yellow teeth at the thought that the mortgage had but one year more to run. Ma tried to pay it off, but he would not let her.

"No, I'm in no hurry. I'm satisfied with my interest and my security," he snarled.

Distrustful of him, she offered, if he would cancel the mortgage then and there, to pay a bonus of five hundred dollars; but, although sorely tempted, he refused.

"I'll git that hotel yet!" he swore to himself. "All these fixings cost a pile o'money; p'raps she'll go bust! Or mebbe when the mortgage falls due, I kin fix it so she can't raise the cash to pay, and I'll have the chance to foreclose! Lots of things can happen in a year!"

So, having installed running water in the bedrooms and added a couple of baths, a new dining room with plate glass windows, an architectural chimneypiece and a radio, and sent Betty to Simmons College, Ma, indulging in a sort of second blooming, walked into Sheriff Moses Higgins' automobile agency one morning and bought herself a dandy little new sedan to trundle her old bones around in.

To Mason it was the last straw. He, who had always been too mean to buy a car himself, was sick with envy of the woman who paid him eight hundred dollars a year voluntarily and out of a sense of justice. The yellow-eyed monster perched upon his shoulder and whispered in his hairy ear.

It was he that should have had that car! The woman had bought it out of his money! He almost persuaded himself that if she had a spark of common decency she would offer to give it to him. And then it slowly dawned upon his jaundiced intelligence that there was no real reason why he should not own a car himself, instead of sponging on anybody who happened to be going in his direction.

Cautiously he let it become known that he was thinkin' some of gettin' a car later on, mebbe, and on the strength of it had several hundred miles of tryouts and demonstrations in both Pottsville and Patterson. All winter long he studied catalogues, canvassed thoroughly the used car question, debated exhaustively the relative desirability of various types with Sheriff Higgins, and at last, when the latter's patience was almost exhausted, broached the proposi-



tion which he had been maturing in his mind.

The Honorable Hezekiah had for twenty years been consumed with a devouring social ambition—that of being elected a member of the Pottsville herd of the Sacred Camels of King Menelik, the benevolent order of which Sheriff Higgins was probably the most influential Dromedary. Thrice had he foisted his name upon the election committee of the local lodge of The Brotherhood of Abyssinian Mysteries to which the herd belonged, and thrice had he been unanimously blackballed. Yet he was not discouraged. Every man had his price. Tit for tat! It would only need a little log rolling. If he purchased the contemplated car from Sheriff Higgins, why should not the latter procure his longed-for election to the Abyssinian Brotherhood?

"Well, sheriff!" he remarked, strolling into the showroom one evening early in April. "I've 'most decided to order one of your Silent Silver Sixes; provided, of course, you're willing to split your commission with me. But there's just one little matter I wanted to talk over with ye first—so's there wouldn't be any misunderstanding later."

"Wal, what is it?" inquired Mose suspiciously.

"You're still Grand Supreme Patriarch of the Sacred Camels, ain't ye?"

The sheriff's face became grim.

"I don't know what you have reference to!" he replied stiffly.

"Bunk!" retorted the squire. "What's the use bein' so mysterious 'bout something everyone knows! Don't I watch you going into the P. of H. Hall every Friday night? I kin see you setting up there in your purple nightgown a-holding your gold spear, right through the window!"

The Grand Supreme Patriarch of the Sacred Camels of King Menelik restrained a homicidal impulse in view of the prospective sale of the Silent Silver Six.

"Speakin' seriously, Mose, what I want to ask you is this: What chance have I got of being took into the brotherhood? I know all the boys, and there ain't nothin' agin me so far as I know. Why can't you get me in?"

The sheriff turned contemptuously on the hard-visaged lawyer.

"Mason," he said frankly, "you've about as much chance to get into any fraternal organization as a celluloid cat to get outer hell. They wouldn't elect ye into the Boy Scouts, the Total Abstinence League, or the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals."



As the squire stalked out of the store Mose almost suffered a relapse.

"Durn it all!" he muttered. "I've lost that sale all right! Now sure as shootin' he'll go over to Job Allen at Patterson and buy one o' them Humming Highjackers!"

But the Honorable Hezekiah fooled 'em all! Contrary to the firmly established and universally accepted moral tenet that every patriotic citizen should buy his car from his own local dealer, the measly skinflint committed the one unpardonable sin. Just to show 'em, he sneaked off to Utiky and bought a four thousand dollar Cytherea sedan on the installment plan, b'gosh!

Hate was not the only motivating cause of the squire's extravagance, for the dealer who sold him the Cytherea had done so at a sacrifice, the car having been originally ordered by Miss Judy Josclyn of the Scarlet Sinners Number 3 Road Company, and never paid for. As Miss Josclyn's taste had expressed itself in a special paint job estimated at seven hundred and seventy-five dollars, involving yellow body and wheels, mud guards, wheel caps and rims, with vermilion trimmings, prospective customers, who as motorists desired to remain modestly inconspicuous, had rather shied from it. Not so Squire Mason! Here was his chance to parade, not only his wealth, but his independence of his fellow townsmen. Keep him out of the Sacred Camels, would they? He would let them see that he could get along quite well without them. He would teach 'em that they could not treat him with indifference and at the same time expect to get his money! He'd make 'em set up and take notice!

"Who's that in the big fancy car?" he could hear the yokels exclaiming to one another.

"That? Don't you know who that is? Why, that's Squire Hezekiah Mason, richest man in Somerset County!"

What they really said was: "Say, Bill, seen Mason's circus parade? He might as well 'a' bought a lion cage and steam calliope!"

But, of course, he trowed not of this, the only fly in the ointment of his satisfaction being the obvious fact that Ma Best's sedan was nearly as big as his.

## II

Came then the great and never-to-be-forgotten day! A scarlet day compensating the citizens of Pottsville and Patterson tenfold—nay, a thousandfold!—for all that they had ever suffered at Hezekiah Mason's hands! A purple day, the

fame of which was destined to go echoing down the corridors of time until no true son or daughter of Pottsville could afford to admit, without losing caste, that he or she had failed to be one of those present and assisting in the dénouement. And since a precise knowledge of the *locus in quo* will contribute toward a fuller enjoyment of the adventure about to be recounted, let us now invite the attention of the jury—as did Squire Mason upon the day of the trial—to a somewhat detailed description of the whereabouts.

Know then, all of ye, that between Pottsville and Patterson Corners runs a highroad that at one point, for a hundred yards or so, borders the turbid overflow from Turkey Pond, forming as it were a causeway, or dike. In winter the boys skate there, but as the spring advances the waters recede and the pond becomes a swamp of black mud, thick or fluid, depending upon the character of the season's rainfall. Now at a point about halfway across this swamp and at the foot of a slight declivity, another road emerges from the woods directly at right angles to the highway. It is a dangerous spot, since a motor coming downhill cannot be seen from the road below, which has no fence or barrier to protect it from the swamp. The road is the road of prosperity for the local inhabitants, who have spared neither labor nor money to make it straight, hard, and smooth, and there is no true knight of the open road, whose eye alights upon that gray ribbon flowing so alluringly into the azure distance, but is irresistibly impelled to put his foot down and "step on it."

And now, gentlemen, having accurately described to you the place where the accident occurred, I must direct your attention to the time, the weather, the *dramatis personæ*, and what is commonly known as the *res gestæ*.

It is not my purpose, gentlemen of the jury, to attempt in any way to palliate the fault of my client, Mrs. Best. What she did, she did!—albeit unintentionally. But it is my duty to place within your reach all of the facts, in order that you may have a full understanding of the case and may be thus enabled, without confusion, fear or favor, to reach a proper decision:

My client, Ma Best—that good sweet soul!—having at first utilized the services of the versatile Ulysses as her chauffeur—when he was not otherwise engaged—and observing the ease and dexterity with which he manipulated the wheel, decided before long to essay driving the car herself. Can you really blame her? Even if she had thoughtlessly neglected to take out a license? Imagine

for yourselves, gentlemen, that beautiful spring afternoon, on Friday, May thirteenth last, with all nature smiling, the birds singing, the great outdoors calling, as well as the commendable humanitarian desire to call upon your old friend Abigail Dix up on Beech Knoll, and inquire after her lumbago. Ulysses is busy at the filling station. Your Silent Silver Six is awaiting you under the portecochère of the hotel. Propelled by an irresistible philanthropic urge, you seat yourself, release the brakes, push the self-starter, listen to its fascinating whir, and gently move off into the sunshine.

## III

**A**t about half after four on that same afternoon Hezekiah Mason, having some interest to collect from a farmer who lived a few miles beyond Patterson Corners, closed his desk, shut and locked the door of his law office and descended the stairs. His beautiful yellow and vermilion Cytherea was awaiting him at the curb, new, glorious, and uninsured—for Hezekiah was a thrifty man and regarded insurance as a pure waste of good money. Seating himself in the sedan, he started her up and gingerly let in the clutch.

The birds were singing, all nature smiling, and so on, and so on. But Hezekiah did not smile. Nature did not amuse him. Carefully—at not more than fifteen miles an hour—he started along the highroad toward Patterson Corners. Just ahead of him, in a dilapidated flivver which he had purchased for thirty dollars, rattled along one Oscar Giddings. As he gained the causeway, the said Oscar, tempted by the smooth surface, put on speed.

Hezekiah, filled with a natural contempt for the wretched junk-shop drawing so rapidly away from him, and not desiring to be left behind, accelerated his own pace. They were about fifty yards apart and going at approximately thirty-five miles an hour as they approached the intersection of the crossroad leading from the knoll. No other cars were in sight. Oscar, unaware that there was a motor behind him, having run by the crossroad, suddenly decided, for no reason at all, to back and turn up it. Without extending his hand, looking around, or giving any other warning, he stopped abruptly, and throwing the gears into reverse, shot backward toward the onrushing and unsuspecting squire, who, thinking only of how he should collect his interest, was paying no attention to the car in front of him, when he suddenly perceived that the flivver, instead

of going in the same direction as himself, was backing toward him and that a collision was apparently inevitable.

Meanwhile Ma Best, who had somehow managed to negotiate the Beech Knoll Road, had satisfied her curiosity about Abigail's lumbago and had started upon her return trip. Halfway down the hill she realized to her horror that the car was out of her control. Hanging for dear life to the wheel, she could but try to steer and call upon the Lord. She did this loudly, as the Silent Six, at thirty miles an hour, bounded down the slope towards the causeway, just as Oscar was slowing up at the entrance of the crossroad and the oncoming squire had jammed on his emergency.

Swinging to the right in a vain effort to clear the flivver, Ma struck the Cytherea squarely in the midriff at the very instant when the Honorable Hezekiah was congratulating himself on his miraculous escape.

There was no justice in it! Squire Mason hadn't done a single thing he oughtn't to have done. He was driving well within the speed limit and was exercising due care; Oscar had deliberately stopped and backed without warning; Ma had no license, and didn't know how to drive anyhow. By every rule of right and equity one or both of the two latter miscreants should have suffered.

But they did not! As fate would have it, the bumper of the Silent Six caught the Cytherea at some mysterious point in its equilibrium, and with a crash that could have been heard in Utica, drove the squire clear off the causeway and into the swamp, as neatly as a drop kick planted squarely between goal posts. Ma was knocked breathless against the steering wheel, but otherwise unharmed; the Silent Six stopped, with a bent bumper, in its tracks. Oscar, hearing the smash, awoke to the realities in time to see the Cytherea lying upon its side in the mud and the Honorable Hezekiah Mason frantically struggling to climb through a badly damaged door.

"For heaven's sake, help a feller, can't ye?" he yelled. "Gol ding it, we're sinkin'!"

He spoke the truth! Beyond peradventure the Cytherea was slowly disappearing into the swamp—sinking by the head in some hole or quicksand.

"Do somethin' quick, can't ye?" bawled the squire, as he squeezed himself through the door and stood erect and apparently uninjured upon the side of the car.

"What kin I do?" inquired the dumfounded Oscar. "If she's

sinkin', she'll sink! I ain't got no way to stop her."

"Haven't you got an emergency chain?"

"No. Haven't you?"

The squire made no reply. He had discarded the idea of an emergency chain as extravagant.

Clouds of steam, accompanied by a fierce hissing, arose from the unfortunate Cytherea.

"Better come ashore!" suggested Oscar.

"How'm I goin' to git ashore?" roared the squire. "This here is quicksand."

"If only there was a fence, I'd throw y' a rail, but there ain't none," Oscar informed him.

"If only there was a brick, I'd throw it at your head!" yelled the desperate attorney. "Why don't you go fer help, instead of standin' there like a pair of idiots doing nothin'?"

At this moment two other cars drew up and the occupants thereof, observing the woebegone squire, extended their derisive sympathy. The Cytherea was now a yellow Atlantis in a black and slimy ocean, which was creeping up over the wheels with the inevitability of Judgment Day. A truckload of farm hands rumbling across the dike stopped, gaped, and burst into a hymn of hate. Other cars appeared from both directions.

People sprouted mysteriously out of the ground, and the Pottsville fire alarm began to sound its tocsin. Soon the causeway was lined with jeering spectators feasting their eyes upon the squire in his extremity, but making no move to help him. They had waited a lifetime for this opportunity and were going to make the most of it. Their witticisms were both mordant and heartless. But the squire, who had at first ground his teeth in impotent rage, was by this time too terrified either to resent or properly evaluate them.

"Jump in, squire! The water's warm!"

"Swim fer it, old mud turtle!"

"What'll you take for the old bus?"

"Can't y' walk on the water?"

Above the chorus of catcalls now was heard the frenzied clanging of a bell, as the Pottsville Hook and Ladder Company came clattering across the causeway. Over on Turtle Pond the whistle of Sampson's Steam Lumber Mill added its shrill voice to the infernal clamor. The red-hatted firemen, led by Grand Supreme Dromedary Mose Higgins, piled off the truck and rushed to the edge of the swamp.

"Hey, squire!" called the sheriff. "Want to buy a nice, new car, if I'll split commissions with ye?"

"Got one'll float?" inquired Toggery Bill Gookin.

"Sell him a marine policy!" suggested someone else.

At that point the Cytherea gave a slight lurch and vanished, leaving the squire protruding from the swamp like a red-faced Statue of Liberty ankle deep in mud.

"Ye ain't goin' to stand there and let me drown, be ye?" he shrieked. "I'll give any feller two dollars that'll throw me a rope."

"Don't be extravagant! It ain't worth it!" retorted one of the onlookers.

"Make it two-fifty!" urged another. "Them pants alone must 'a' cost two dollars!"

Ma, who had been feeling a little faint and generally discom-bobulated, suddenly revived and burst into song:

*"Throw out the life line!  
Throw out the life line!  
Somebody's sinking out there!"*

They all joined in the chorus.

The mud was now up to the squire's knees. Clearly of the opinion that they would deliberately let him drown, he raised imploring hands clasped in a prayer.

"Save me!" he begged hoarsely. "Have some pity, can't ye? I know most of you folks has it in fer me, but if you get me out of this, I swear—"

"Don't swear, squire!" advised the sheriff. "And don't make no rash promises! We're goin' to save you. We need somethin' to amuse us durin' the long winter evenings!"

He hurled an improvised lasso at the cowering figure. It dropped over the squire's shoulders and he clutched at it desperately.

"Now then, boys!" And with cries of joy the Sacred Camels of King Menelik laid hold upon the line and rushed with it across the road. It tightened. The Honorable Hezekiah Mason tried to move his feet, failed, and at the next tug toppled forward face down in the mud.

"All together!"

Thus ignominiously did they pull him ashore upon his belly. Coated with slime and weeds, as it might have been with tar and feathers, he staggered to his feet upon the causeway. Shaking his

fist at his rescuers and spitting out eel grass, he shouted:

"I'll have the law on all of ye for this! An' ye'll pay well for it! Damages, special damages, and exemplary damages! Y'll be sorry ye ever pulled me out!"

"We knew that when we did it," replied the sheriff. "But we thought suffocatin' was too easy a death for ye. We're savin' you for somethin' special and exemplary! An' when we git through with ye, we're going to have ye stuffed!"

#### IV

**I**t was not without due warning, therefore, that the Honorable Hezekiah commenced his famous one-hundred-thousand dollar action for personal injuries against Ma Best, the Town of Pottsville and Oscar Giddings.

Alleging quite properly that through their joint acts and negligences he had been severely bruised, contused, and otherwise damaged, and had suffered severe internal injuries of a permanently disabling character, together with great physical pain and mental agony, and had lost his new Cytherea sedan car, and put his gold watch on the blink, and spoiled his pants and his hat and what not, and so forth, and of a truth, moreover, and then some, and again, and even so—and they were every one of 'em equally responsible, each having contributed to the debacle, viz, sic and to wit:

(A) The defendant Best, because she had negligently run into him while driving without a license; (B) the defendant Giddings, because he had negligently backed without giving any warning, and thus forced him, Mason, the said plaintiff, into the position where he was hit; and (C) the defendant Town of Pottsville, because it had negligently failed to maintain a proper wall, fence, or other barrier at the side of the road, as a result of which he had been knocked into the swamp and pecuniarily damaged as to his health and person and belongings, as follows:

Five thousand by the loss of his car, five hundred for his watch, one hundred for his clothes, three and a half for his hat, fifty cents for being taken back to Pottsville, and one hundred thousand for his bodily injuries, external, internal, real and imaginary, past, present, and future, with costs, and interest, and disbursements to date, amounting in all to the sum of one hundred and seventeen thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars and eighty-seven

*cents, sic transit gloria mundi, quod erat demonstrandum, in loco parentis*, and God save the State of New York. Signed, Hezekiah Mason, Attorney and Counselor at Law; Office and Post-office Address: Five Cents Savings Bank Block, Pottsville, Somerset County, New York.

Mr. Tutt, who had arrived at the Phoenix Hotel on his annual spring fishing trip upon the very day the complaint was served, perused the monstrous thing with keen attention. He loved Pottsville and the Phoenix—even in its new war paint—and he adored Ma Best, and he quickly perceived how the crafty squire intended to divert the sweet uses of adversity into an opportunity to get Ma's little patrimony away from her, by securing a substantial judgment, too large for her to pay in cash, and foreclosing on his mortgages. A clever Dick this Machiavellian country squire! Even had the Pottsville treasury contained enough money to satisfy a reasonable judgment—which it did not—it could not satisfy Mason. What he was hungering to get his clutches on was the Phoenix Hotel with its growing trade. Hence for all practical purposes Ma was the only defendant.

"Who's this Oscar Thingamyjig?" asked Mr. Tutt as he handed her back the paper.

"Oscar Giddings? Oh, he's just a poor farmer who does odd jobs around Sampson's Mill. His wife's always been sick and they have a whole flock of small children. I don't s'pose Oscar's got ten dollars cash in the world."

"Does Mason know that?"

"Sure. 'Course, he knows it!"

Mr. Tutt canted his stogy toward the ceiling and studied the insects decorating the new electric globe that had replaced the ancient kerosene lamp.

"Could you get him over here in such a way that he wouldn't be seen?"

"Yes, I can get hold of him easily enough. He always stops in to Colson's for his mail about five o'clock. I'll speak to him this afternoon and ask him to call here after supper."

Promptly at seven thirty o'clock Oscar Giddings arrived. Obviously poor in more senses than one—in goods, in health and in appearance—it was fantastic to suppose that Mason honestly expected to squeeze any money out of him.

He now stood by the door twisting his cap and evidently expecting a word lashing from Mr. Tutt for having been the fundamental



cause of the accident. In this he was agreeably surprised.

"Come in and sit down, Oscar," remarked Mr. Tutt genially. "Have a cigar? And how about a piece of pie and a cup of coffee?"

"Sounds pretty good to me!" replied Giddings, thus encouraged.

"How are you getting on?"

"Fair to middlin'. Leastways I was until this accident happened. I s'pose now I'll have to hire a lawyer, and that'll take all the money I've saved up."

"I don't suppose you'd fancy having Squire Mason get a judgment against you for a hundred thousand dollars?"

Giddings, in the act of elevating a large piece of apple pie, paused and grinned.

"It wouldn't make a mite of difference to me how big it was, if it was over eight dollars. That's all I've got. Say!" he added. "He can't put me in jail, can he?"

"No—although you ought to be there!" replied the old lawyer. "He can't put you in jail, owing to the unfortunate fact that nobody was killed. If the squire had been drowned you might have been convicted of manslaughter in the second degree."

"I sure was careless!" freely admitted Oscar. "It's mostly my fault. If I hadn't backed up, the squire wouldn't have had to slow down, and if he hadn't slowed down, he wouldn't have been where Ma could hit him."

"You know what he's after?" continued Mr. Tutt. "He wants to get a judgment against Ma so big that she can't pay his mortgage when it comes due next year, and he can foreclose."

"Then why is he suing me?"

"Perhaps because he thinks that he may somehow squeeze something out of you or hopes, by dropping the case against you, to induce you to testify in his behalf against Ma."

"He's got another guess coming to him if he thinks that!" declared Giddings.

Mr. Tutt handed him a stogy. "You'd like to help Ma?"

"You bet! Anyways I can!"

"Then I wish you'd go to Mason and, without letting him know that you've seen me, try to settle his personal claim against you."

"What with?"

Mr. Tutt took a hundred-dollar bill from his wallet and gave it to him.

"Go to Mason and tell him that you have no use for lawyers, and don't want to waste what little money you have by paying an

attorney what you really ought to turn over to him in settlement of his claim. That'll appeal to him! Tell him you've only got five dollars cash of your own, but that, if he'll settle with you for forty or fifty dollars, you'll try and borrow the difference. He'll probably jump at the chance. Make a date with him for the next day. Then get this bill changed over at the bank, and when you go into Mason's office, before giving him the amount agreed upon, demand a release. He will be quite ready to give you one, and will probably start to fill in a printed form. At this point you must begin to show signs of uneasiness. Just imagine that you're one of these actor fellows. 'Mr. Mason,' you will say, 'I don't know anything about law and I'm not much on reading and writing.' You can pretend that for once, whether it's accurate or not. 'Your receipt may be all right, but I'd rather you'd sign one I can understand. I wrote this out in my own hand. If it suits you, it will suit me.' If he signs, you can pay him the money; not otherwise."

"Where will I get the receipt?"

"I'll make one out for you. Have you got any writing paper at your house? Fine! Use a pencil and be careful to copy the spelling exactly—whether it looks right to you or not. And you can keep all you can save out of the hundred dollars."

"Fair enough!"

"You might give Mason to understand that if he settles with you in this way, it won't do him any harm on the trial and may do him some good. He's a crook, and a crook is always ready to believe everyone else is crooked too."

"Well," returned Oscar, "I'm sure glad I came over here."

"The pleasure is mutual," said Mr. Tutt. "I wonder if you could stage another little act for me? Before you first go to see Mason, I should like you to have an open-air quarrel with Ma over who was to blame for the accident. Select the most public place in town and a time when plenty of folks are around. I promise that whatever profanity you use will be freely forgiven you."

## V

**T**he great fight between Ma Best and Oscar Giddings is still discussed as one of the historic events of Somerset County, and to this day neither party is quite sure just how far the other was making believe. It started at five o'clock on Saturday afternoon in front of Colson's Grocery, and inside of ten

minutes Oscar had lost his collar and necktie and Ma her false front. By five twenty the entire voting population, including dogs and small boys, were participating in the row, and it was still being carried on vicariously long after the principal actors had been carried off the field. Yes, it was a great success in every way, including the accidental presence of the Honorable Hezekiah Mason himself, who, on crutches and with his arm in a sling, happened to be limping by just in time to see Ma lambasting Oscar over the coconut with one of old Colson's brooms. In fact, rumor hath it that so keen was his delight in the spectacle that at its conclusion he offered to make good to old Colson—"s'long as it was spoiled anyhow"—the cost price of the broom, if he'd send the relic over to the office.

Ma, who did not know in the least what it was all about, looked forward to the trial with apprehension, particularly in view of Mr. Tutt's open admission that her chance was slim. The most they could hope for on the undisputed facts was that the jury would render a verdict small enough for her to pay and at the same time have enough left to meet the squire's mortgage. The whole Valley of the Mohawk, from Amsterdam in the east to Utiky in the west, was agog over the approaching trial, for the tidings had penetrated to the remotest hamlet that Mr. Tutt was going to sacrifice his vacation and defend Ma Best, and that Squire Mason intended to try his own case. For the Honorable Hezekiah's object was clear to all—his iniquitous purpose, under guise of an innocent action for personal injuries, to gain title to and possession of the Phoenix Hotel, rake in the shekels as lord proprietor thereof, and compel Ma to work for him *de jure* as she now did *de facto*.

Ma confessed to Mr. Tutt that with any sort of a verdict the squire would probably be able to accomplish his fell design, for the truth was that the Phoenix was overextended. Ma had been coining money, yes; but the blue and white paint, the new plumbing system, the garage, the vermilion birds and Ulysses' green livery had not all yet been paid for. And the trouble was, she had no defense! To go driving around without a license was *res ipsa loquitur*—negligence *per se*! Irrespective of brakes or anything else, it shifted the burden to her of proving that she was not to blame, when everybody knew that she was, at least in part. It was darned hard luck for her that Oscar Giddings had taken it into his head to go backing around that way, but if Ma hadn't been driving a motor car when she had no legal right to do so, the squire would not have been knocked into the swamp. And as to damages! The Cytherea had vanished

forever. "*Spurlos versenkt!*" No derrick or wrecking machine was of the slightest use when you couldn't find hide or hair of the remains! Apparently, although no one had ever so suspected, the hole in the swamp went clear through to Chiny! Perhaps some Mongol emperor or Tibetan lama was even now racing around the Gobi Desert in that gorgeous chariot.

So it was reasonably clear that the squire was entitled as matter of law to the Cytherea's replacement value—four thousand dollars anyway. And there were his costs and disbursements—say two hundred and fifty dollars more—and his minor property damages, watch, trousers, hat, and so on—say fifty—before you even got to the scratches on his epidermis and those permanent internal injuries which the old fox was parading so publicly. The squire, as his own attorney, might have a fool for a client, but he was certainly taking all the steps to insure getting a verdict.

Already one surgeon and two gastrointestinal specialists from Utica had engaged rooms at the Phoenix for the duration of the trial, and it was asserted by those who were backing the plaintiff—the odds over at Colson's were quoted at two and a half to one; no bet received over ten cents—that the squire could prove positively that since, and directly owing to, the accident he had (1) lost appetite, (2) been unable to sleep, or if he did, suffered from agonizing dreams in which he was being hurled naked over a precipice, (3) was afflicted with constant headaches, (4) found his eyesight growing dim, (5) could not freely use his right hand, (6) discovered one leg had become shorter than the other, (7) experienced sudden fits of nervousness, (8) was constantly afflicted with shooting pains in and about, adjacent and appertaining to, the groin and abdomen, (9) had damaged his coccyx, his *sartorius longus*, and his *pons asinorum*, (10) had great difficulty in breathing, and (11) suffered from unexplained attacks of nausea on arising in the morning—by reason of all of which his health and earning capacity had been permanently impaired to the tune of a hundred thousand dollars.

Anyhow, all agreed that—no matter how much of a liar he was!—he was sure of a verdict unless the jury deliberately violated their oaths, which they certainly would not do. For Pottsville prided itself upon its application of a legal system that did justice to rich and poor, beloved or despised, Jew and Gentile, even Republican and Democrat, alike. The very fact that Mason was suing his native town, and that the jury would be composed largely of Sacred Camels, would only make 'em tend to lean over backward.

And then Mason made his great gesture! He publicly announced that, in spite of the town's negligence in failing to provide a proper protection upon the open, or swamp, side of the causeway, he had no intention of penalizing his fellow citizens who had so remotely contributed to the result. He would confine himself to the two defendants, who by their joint, direct, and cooperative acts had smashed him up. In a word, even if there had been a fence to prevent his being precipitated into the swamp, Ma Best would have crashed into the Cytherea just the same, and it was possible that the soft mud had saved him from greater injuries—if that were possible. So the squire indulged in his little stageplay, discontinued his action against the town, and went to trial against the two joint tort-feasors—Ma Best and Oscar Giddings.

The case drew the biggest gate ever known in Somerset County—except the famous trial of Skinny the Tramp for the murder of the Hermit of Turkey Hollow—for everybody knew that it was really a fight for the Phoenix Hotel. Besides, they all were eager to hear the squire's account of those terrible experiences that had given him the cramps and injured his coccyx. Even if the result was to be a foregone conclusion, the gathering agriculturists—sea lawyers all of them—licked their chops at the prospect of hearing Old Man Tutt cross-examine the wily Hezekiah. It was sure to be a battle royal.

The rising sun disclosed hanging over the roads leading to Pottsville a sinuous dust cloud beneath which jangled, coughed, and rattled every known make of motor vehicle in use since the erection of the Dewey Arch. There wasn't an inch of parking space left on Main Street. Every room at the Phoenix was taken and by five A.M. the queue waiting at the door of the courthouse reached all the way to Toggery Bill Gookin's Gents' Furnishing Store. Ma Best, who had been unable to snatch a wink of sleep all night, seized what she pessimistically believed would be a last opportunity, to drive a brisk trade in coffee and doughnuts with these early birds—at the rate of ten cents a worm. More distinguished, or more favored, visitors she indulged, in the Phoenix Hotel dining room, on breakfast food, griddle cakes, hot rolls, bacon, and eggs, for a dollar and a quarter per, and she had taken in two hundred and ninety dollars by nine o'clock, when Sheriff Mose Higgins crossed the street to the courthouse and unlocked the door.

Instantly the assembled throng burst in, filling every seat, and in five minutes there wasn't available space left upon the floor for

another pair of high boots. Even the windows were lined with faces of small boys, many of the owners of which were more or less suspended in mid-air, or at least lying head down on the roof above, where any self-respecting cat would have found difficulty in securing a foothold. In a word, and speaking by the book, there was a jam so big that Sheriff Higgins swore in another deputy—vice present-headwaiter Sam Bellows resigned—to keep the crowd in front of the steps moving, and to see that the principal actors and the witnesses gained admission without physical injury—or even *damnum absque injuria*.

But although Mr. Tutt had dined and slept at the hotel the night before, he had now utterly and unaccountably disappeared, and nobody had the remotest idea what had become of him. Gone fishin', prob'ly! Could he have forgotten all about this momentous occasion? Could anything have happened to him? And if he did not arrive, would old Judge Tompkins grant Ma an adjournment?

By nine forty-five everything was set. Squire Mason, bandaged as to one arm, and using a cane, limped up the steps and made his way to the counsel table amid an ominous silence. Sheriff Higgins, chewing the official gum, glared around the crowded room.

"If I hear any more hissing," quoth he, "I'll throw everybody out!" And thereupon everyone hissed!

The clock on the rear wall of the courtroom moved imperceptibly to ten o'clock, Judge Tompkins ascended the bench, the roll of the jury was called, and still no Mr. Tutt! Ma was in despair.

"Mason versus Town of Pottsville, *et al.*," called out His Honor.

"Ready for the plaintiff," responded Squire Mason, laboring to his feet by means of his cane. "The action has been discontinued against all parties except the defendant Best. I am ready to proceed."

Judge Tompkins looked inquiringly at Ma.

"I see that you are represented by Mr. Ephraim Tutt," said he. "Do you expect him to be here?"

"He promised to come," she replied. "I don't know where he can be!"

"When did you see him last?"

"Last evenin' at suppertime," answered Ma helplessly. "I guess he must of gone off fishing!"

"Well," declared His Honor, "I don't see how we can force you to trial without counsel. Do you, Squire Mason?"

"You oughtn't to hold me responsible for his not bein' here,"

replied Mason wrathfully. "If Mr. Tutt isn't enough interested in this case to stop fishing for a few hours, the defendant had better substitute other counsel for him. There's just as good lawyers in this town as there are in New York!"

"That's all right!" retorted His Honor. "But I'm not going to penalize the defendant either. I'll grant an adjournment—"

"Hold on a minute!" shouted Mason, waving his arms and obviously forgetting in his excitement that he was supposed to be disabled. "To adjourn the case would work a great hardship on me. I have brought expert medical witnesses from a long distance and at much expense!" He pointed to the three graybeards sitting in a row on the front bench. "I have subpoenaed some twenty local witnesses as to the facts. It wouldn't be fair to make me bring 'em all here over again when—as everybody knows—there's no defense. Mrs. Best won't deny that she was driving her car without a license when she run into me. . . . Ask her! The only question is one of damages, and any lawyer could cross-examine my witnesses, if he had a couple of hours' preparation. Why not call the case, put a jury in the box, and then adjourn until two o'clock? Mrs. Best can retain a lawyer in the meantime."

"There is a good deal of force in what Squire Mason says," remarked Judge Tompkins. "What do you think, Mrs. Best? It is highly desirable that we should not bring all these witnesses here again. Will you try and get another lawyer by afternoon?"

Squire Mason nodded and beamed.

"We'll try to make a little headway," said His Honor. "Fill the jury box, Mr. Wadhams, and let Squire Mason examine the talesmen, so that those who are disqualified for any reason need not be detained any longer than is necessary."

"Perhaps I'd better make a general statement about the nature of the case," said Mason, confident that things were going his way, and that the tide in his affairs, if taken at the flood, would lead on to fortune. If he could only rush the case through before Mr. Tutt got back, it might mean thousands of dollars in his pocket.

"It may save time. I see no objection. Go ahead!" said His Honor. "I would be glad to learn something of the case myself."

The squire turned to the assembled talesmen.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he began, "this is an action for dam—"

He stopped short. From outside came a burst of cheers: "Hurrah for Mr. Tutt!"—"Soak it to the old skinflint!"—"Lambaste the son of a gun!" came through the windows, creating, strangely enough,



no confusion whatever in the minds of the spectators as to whom these latter admonitions referred to. Speech, for once, failed the squire. It was hard luck for him if Tutt had come back, but after all, he consoled himself, it wasn't going to make any difference in the result.

"Hurray! Hurray for Mr. Tutt!" yelled the crowd, stampeding for the door of the courtroom and bearing the old lawyer helplessly along with them.

"For dam—ages," finished the squire inaudibly, as Old Man Tutt appeared in the doorway arrayed in full fishing regalia, including khaki jacket, rubber waders, creel, net, and rod. Removing his ancient grey felt hat, he made his way to the rail.

"Good morning, Your Honor! . . . Good morning, squire! . . . I crave your pardon for being late, but the fact is that I was unexpectedly, and unavoidably detained. If, however, you will forgive my appearance, I am quite ready to proceed with the case."

"Well, I've no objection, if your adversary hasn't," smiled Judge Tompkins. "Go ahead, Squire Mason, and select your jury. No, I forgot! Go on with your remarks!"

But the squire seemed to have lost interest in his contemplated speech.

"We might as well proceed in the usual way," he said rather feebly.

So the box was filled with twelve good and true hardboiled citizens, who without exception solemnly assured Squire Mason that they were lovers of all mankind, including himself, without regard to character, business or profession, religion or politics, and that it would be a cinch for them to do perfect justice between him and Ma Best, and that they could treat a Democrat as well as a Republican, and would not favor the defendant because she was a woman, and that they had heard nothing whatever about the case, or about the Brotherhood of Abyssinian Mysteries or the Sacred Camels of King Menelik—whatever that may have had to do with it—and that they had never stopped over to, or taken a meal at, the Phoenix House or spoken to the defendant Ma—Mrs.—Best, or been convicted of a crime or done anything they should not have done, or heard anything whatever which would prejudice them against the unfortunate plaintiff whose damages they would be called upon to assess.

"I'll take the first twelve that come along!" said Mr. Tutt, nodding to the triple quartet of supermen in the box. "Go right ahead,



squire, and expound your wrongs!"

Accordingly the jury were sworn and Squire Mason once more arose and, while Mr. Tutt feigned to fall fast asleep—as perhaps he really was!—recounted the story of his misfortunes, including the injuries to his *sartorius longus* and *pons asinorum*, and then requested permission to reverse the order of proof and to call his witnesses a little out of order, so that they might get back to their patients as soon as possible. Doctor Dignum, step up here, please!

Doctor Dignum was a sour-visaged, desiccated medico with a soiled, rattish-yellow beard, who looked as if he had stepped out of the Eden Musée, but as a witness he proved to be an unqualified "wow." He had attended practically all the universities and medical schools in the known world, had read everything in every language, including the Scandinavian, and there was nothing connected with therapeutics, biology, microbiology, surgery, immunology, or psychoanalysis that he did not know intimately. He was not one of those of whom it could be said that:

*A pancreas on the human rim  
A yellow pancreas was to him  
And it was nothing more.*

Far from it! If injured, said pancreas became instantly to Doctor Dignum the basis of a one-hundred-thousand-dollar suit for damages. He swore not only that he had examined the squire's gastrointestinal tract and analyzed the contents thereof, but had studied his entire anatomy as well, including his coccyx, and that in his expert opinion, as a result of the shock, of the collision, and being knocked into the swamp; the Honorable Hezekiah would be permanently disabled and his earning capacity impaired for the rest of his natural life.

In similar fashion Doctors Watts and Tuzzy gave evidence, estimating the squire's damages just referred to as nearly equal to that of the Johnstown Flood, throughout all of which testimony Mr. Tutt gently dozed and, some said, mildly snored, to awake only at the judge's query of:

"Have you anything to ask in cross-examination?"

"Nothing!" murmured Mr. Tutt sleepily.

"Then may my witnesses go back to Utica?" inquired the squire in some surprise.

"They may go to—Utica!" said Mr. Tutt, winking at the jury.

## VI

**A**t last the crucial moment arrived when Squire Mason, somewhat nervously it must be confessed, ascended the witness chair, and in a weak and permanently injured voice told the sad story of the catastrophe of Friday, the thirteenth day of May.

"Will you concede that your client was driving without a license?" asked Judge Tompkins, addressing the defense.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Tutt.

His Honor raised his eyebrows.

"Merely for the purpose of shortening the trial, may I inquire if you are willing to concede that she was guilty of negligence and that the plaintiff was exercising due care?"

"I am," agreed Mr. Tutt, while the jury stared at him, and the crowd on the benches breathed hard. He must be asleep to concede away his case like that!

"Then am I to understand that this proceeding is merely in the nature of an inquest to assess damages?"

"Not at all!"

Judge Tompkins sank back.

"Very well, then! Cross-examine."

Mr. Tutt stood up and faced the Honorable Hezekiah. The two ancient adversaries looked into each other's eyes.

"Mr. Mason," began Mr. Tutt, "I gather from your opening address and subsequent testimony that you claim this unfortunate accident was due to the joint negligence of the town of Pottsville, of one Oscar Giddings, and of my client, Mrs. Best?"

"I do," answered the squire, his confidence once more regained. "However, I've discontinued the action so far as the town and Giddings are concerned."

"I am aware of that. How long have you known Mr. Giddings?"

"A long time—ten years anyhow."

"He is a very poor man, isn't he?"

"Yes. That's the reason I didn't want to be too hard on him."

"You didn't think it would be worthwhile, did you?"

"Partly that."

"You didn't entertain any such charitable sentiment toward my client, Mrs. Best?"

"No, she's a rich woman!" snapped the squire.

"Owns the Phoenix Hotel?"

"I believe so."

"A valuable property?"

"So-so."

"You've got a mortgage on it for ten thousand dollars which falls due next May?"

"Yep."

"What was the consideration given by you for that mortgage?"

Squire Mason addressed the court. "I object. What's that got to do with it?"

"I will allow it—on the question of possible bias."

The Honorable Hezekiah compressed his lips.

"I took it in settlement of my claim against her father, Doc Barrows; he swindled me."

"Out of how much?"

"I reckon he cost me over ten thousand dollars."

"Isn't it the fact that you only lost five thousand, and that you blackmailed my client out of the balance by threatening to send her father to prison?"

"I did not. He was goin' anyway!"

The old lawyer shrugged his high shoulders.

"H'm! He *went* anyway! I concede that!"

Mr. Tutt took a sip of water from the tumbler beside him, then fumbled in his trousers pockets and drew forth a wrinkled piece of paper.

"Did you make an independent settlement with Giddings?"

The squire flushed slightly.

"I did," he admitted cautiously.

"How much did you get out of him?"

"I let him off for sixty-five dollars."

"Didn't think you could squeeze any more out of him, did you?"

The Honorable Hezekiah once more appealed to the judge.

"I object to that question!" he snapped.

"You needn't answer it, then!" bowed Mr. Tutt. "Did you, in return for Giddings' sixty-five dollars, give him a receipt?"

"I did."

"Is this it?" Mr. Tutt smoothed out the paper and stepped toward the witness.

"Let me see it," interjected Judge Tompkins, holding out his hand.

Silence ensued while he perused the document. Squire Mason tried to look unconcerned.

"Is this the receipt you gave to Giddings?" asked the judge finally.

"I guess so. Looks familiar!" replied Mason, in a vain attempt at jocularity.

"I offer it in evidence," announced Mr. Tutt.

"Received." Judge Tompkins was squinting at Mason over his spectacles. The audience sensed that there was something brewing somewhere.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said Mr. Tutt, showing the foreman the paper, "please examine this exhibit with care. I pay Squire Mason the compliment of assuming that it is not in his handwriting. . . . Am I right, squire? . . . I thought so! However, that does not affect its validity." He read it slowly so that all could hear:

i hereby sertify Oscar Giddings has give me sixti five dollres  
in full settlemint of his libilty for the damage he done me in  
the axident on may 13

HEZEKIAH MASON.

"You gave that written satisfaction to Oscar Giddings for a valuable consideration?" continued Mr. Tutt gravely, once more returning to the witness.

"Sure," replied the squire uneasily, beginning to realize that something was wrong, but not knowing what it was.

"I move that the complaint in this action be dismissed!" said Mr. Tutt quietly.

The judge swung around toward the bewildered attorney in the witness chair.

"Squire Mason, what have you to say to that?"

The Honorable Hezekiah gaped at him.

"I dunno—what I—should say!" he stammered.

"Don't you realize that in accepting sixty-five dollars from Giddings in full satisfaction of his liability you released all parties?"

The squire grabbed tight the arms of his chair. For a moment he thought the court must be joking with him.

"How do you mean—all parties?"

"Are you not aware of the rule of law whereby a release and satisfaction to one of several joint tort-feasors operates to release all?"

"No-o," he stammered. "I never heard of it!"

"Evidently not! Well, whether you have or not, that's the law!" Judge Tompkins turned to the amazed jury:

"It is an ancient and well-established rule, almost without exception in England and America, that for a single injury there can be but one recompense. When more than one unite in the commission of a wrong, each is responsible for the acts of all and for the whole damage. Also, when separate and independent acts of negligence by different people concur in perpetrating a single injury, each is fully responsible for the trespass. Courts will not undertake to apportion the damage in such cases among the joint wrongdoers. The injured party has at his election his remedy against all or any number. He may elect to look to one only, and, if he accepts from that one a benefit or property in satisfaction and release, he can go no further. He cannot have a second satisfaction. Having had reparation from one, who was responsible for all the damage, and released him, all others who were jointly, or jointly and severally, liable are also released. One satisfaction is a bar to further proceedings in the same cause of action. The plaintiff in this case, having elected to look to the defendant Giddings for his remedy and released him, cannot proceed further. He has—er—unintentionally, perhaps, released the defendant Best as well. The complaint is therefore dismissed. You are discharged with the thanks of the court. Clear the box, sheriff. Is there anything else on the calendar?"

"No, Yerroner," replied the Grand Supreme Patriarch of the Sacred Camels. "I kinder think this is enough for one day."

"Then adjourn court."

There was a wild rush forward upon the part of those present to congratulate Ma Best upon her unexpected victory. Squire Mason seized the opportunity to escape unostentatiously from the courtroom, and those who noticed him on his way out commented upon the fact that he walked with a vigor which showed no sign of being impaired. Judge Tompkins, in spite of the adjournment, had remained upon the bench to glance over some papers.

Mr Tutt coughed interrogatively.

"If Your Honor please, since the court is no longer in session, may I make an announcement?"

"Go as far as you like," answered the court.

Mr. Tutt faced the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Sons and Daughters of King Menelik, Brother Camels, visiting firemen, and all strangers within the gates of Pottsville, on behalf of my client, Mrs. Best, I take pleasure in stating that as soon as she can change her duds and get into a

calico apron, a dole of coffee and doughnuts will be served gratis at the Phoenix Hotel to all comers from now until three o'clock. Come and eat your fill, free from the distressing thought that you are in so doing benefiting our worthy friend Squire Mason. I thank you!"

"But how can I ever thank *you*, Mr. Tutt!" exclaimed Ma, as the crowd poured out whooping into the street. "How can I pay you for what you've done for me? There isn't anything in the world I wouldn't do for you."

"You can do one thing for me!" replied Mr. Tutt.

"Please mention it!"

"Then take down all those doggone vermilion birds you've got hanging from the trees between here and Patterson—'eat signs,' I believe they're called—and rip that green uniform off Ulysses, and paint out the blue stripes on the front of the Phoenix, and put a muffler on the radio. Modern comfort isn't half so good as the old fashioned kind. Don't you agree with me, judge?"

"Er—what was that?" inquired His Honor, looking up from the document before him. Then he sniffed and wrinkled his nose. "For Pete's sake, Eph, what's that infernal—pugh!—smell?"

Mr. Tutt somewhat shamefacedly lifted his creel from beneath the table. "Darn if I didn't forget all about those trout!" he explained.

"What made you so late?"

Mr. Tutt pulled out a couple of stogies and handed one to the judge.

"Do you know that big pool halfway up Chasm Brook?"

"Do I!" retorted His Honor, lighting one of the stogies.

"Well," went on Mr. Tutt, lighting the other stogy, "we were driving over the hill on our way back this morning, and I just couldn't resist trying a cast or two. So I sneaked up to the pool and—gosh, you should 'a' seen the rise I got!"

"Hook him?" demanded Tompkins excitedly.

"Sure, I hooked him! But," he added ruefully, "he got away!"

Judge Tompkins regarded his friend thoughtfully.

"Say, Eph," he remarked, "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you. How do you spell 'certify'?"

"That depends!" said Mr. Tutt.

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Mark Simpson

**DOROTHY SIMPSON**

**D**orothy Simpson's Inspector Luke Thanet made his first appearance in 1981 in *The Night She Died*. The *Washington Post* called it "a first-rate job from a writer with subtlety," while *Kirkus Reviews* compared the author to P. D. James. It's a fair comparison: Simpson is female, British, and her focus is on the psychology of victim and murderer. But though characters are important to Thanet's creator, Simpson owes no apologies for her plots.

Detective Inspector Thanet is a rather average, decent, bright policeman who tries to deal fairly with everyone without getting too involved. (He rarely succeeds at the latter, however.) In *The Night She Died*,

he has just "joined the nation's army of back sufferers," and "his first reaction had been one of outrage." He's dutifully "doing his daily fifteen minutes on the rack (the rolling-pin)" when the phone rings. The body of Julie Holmes, a pretty young housewife who has been stabbed on her own staircase, has just been discovered by her husband. The investigation into the stabbing leads Thanet into Julie's past—and the discovery that as a young child she had witnessed a murder, but apparently had no memory of the incident. Things are not what they seem, though, as the good Thanet eventually discovers.

Things are not what they seem in *Six Feet Under*, either, the second book in the series.

When the body of a middle-aged spinster is found in an outbuilding behind her house, everyone appears to be surprised that anyone would bother her. Carrie Birch was dowdy, mousy, unmemorable—wasn't she? She took care of her unlovely and invalided mother, and cleaned the homes of her neighbors for extra income. Then Thanet finds treasures in Carrie's attic, and begins to sense the antipathy that Carrie's neighbors felt for her. Suddenly there seem to be too many suspects; almost everyone who knew her had a reason to hate Carrie Birch. This is a fascinating portrait of a twisted mind, a woman whose mother and circumstances forced her to live out her fantasies alone, and to seek power over others (who seemed in enviable positions compared to Carrie's own) through knowledge of their most private secrets. And even when it becomes apparent the way Thanet is leaning, his intuitive leap to the truth is guaranteed to leave his readers several paces behind. The ending is a shocker; you'll love it.

*Puppet for a Corpse* is a puzzler, too, equally satisfying in its way. Again the victim's death surprises everyone: Dr. Arnold Pettifer, as everyone agrees, is the last man on earth to kill himself. And yet if it isn't suicide, then who could have set

up such a likely-looking one? And why would all the prime suspects if it were murder—the doctor's partner, his beautiful wife, his stepson—offer the most vocal and convincing arguments *against* its being suicide? As Thanet digs into the past of victim and suspects alike, he pieces together the characters of the people involved. His almost incredible theory begins to take shape . . . but now he has to prove it.

Getting to know the victim—a fifteen-year-old girl—is also Thanet's prime objective in *Close Her Eyes*. The investigation turns up some startling slants on the dead girl's life which give the lie to the picture of her strict religious upbringing and schoolgirl innocence. It also gives Thanet a string of suspects with motives. The detective's curiosity and his sympathy with the dead girl ultimately reveal the whole tragic story, though it's too late for the murderer.

One learns a great deal about Thanet, his wife, and his partner in the course of the novels. His wife Joan, for instance, patiently suffers with him through his long ordeal with his back. By the second novel, though, she's quietly desperate on her own account: they had agreed that after their children were in school, Joan would go back to work. Thanet has grown ac-



customed to having everything done for him by a wife who is always at home. The thought of change is painful to him, and their exchanges on the topic are engrossing to overhear.

The third continuing character in the series, Thanet's frequent partner Detective Sergeant Mike Lineham, is trapped between a possessive, widowed mother and an impatient fiancée. *Six Feet Under*,

published in 1982, ends with Mike walking down the aisle. His troubles aren't over, though, as we see in the next two books, *Puppet for a Corpse* (1983) and *Close Her Eyes* (1984.)

So, put aside your spring cleaning or gardening chores for a few hours this month to enjoy these neatly crafted detective stories. All four were published in hardcover by Charles Scribner's Sons.

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## MYSTERY REVIEWS

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Michael Innes's mysteries starring Sir John Appleby have been profiled in these pages. I'm pleased to say there's a new title in the series, **Carson's Conspiracy** (Dodd, Mead & Company, \$13.95, 183 pp.). Sir John is still in retirement, but the detecting instincts are yet strong in him. Furthermore, his odd neighbors, the Carsons, seem intent on pulling him into their travails. The fact that we get to see Carson developing a scheme gives us a distinct edge over Appleby (or so we believe), but don't become overconfident: along with the usual wit and wisdom embodied in the sensible Appleby, Innes has a surprise in store for everyone at the book's end.

Sierra Club Books is publishing its first "eco-thriller," and it's an auspicious debut. **The Turquoise Dragon** by David Rains Wallace introduces George Kilgore, whose past includes his disenchantment as a forest ranger, his increasing paranoia as a marijuana farmer, and his more recent struggles to live by replanting forests in the Northwest. His discovery of the body of an old friend drives him to investigate—and leads him into some hair-raising escapades. This is grown-up stuff, not for the squeamish, for the drug trade apparently breeds greed, sadism, and general psychopathology. But George is likable, true to himself, painfully honest, and gutsy, and the author's knowledge of the rugged regions of Northern California's Klamath Mountains—not to mention lots of trivia about wildlife, plants, etc.—makes this a fresh change of pace from the urban settings of most private eye fiction. (\$12.95, 256 pp.)

# THE STORY THAT WON



Arthur Tress

The Mid-December Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Thomas A. Bowden of Baltimore, Maryland. Honorable mentions go to Richard Ciciarelli of Phelps, New York; Betty Human of Modesto, California; Matt DeMarco of Ventura, California; Brad Horning of Kelowna, B. C., Canada; E. W. Simonsen of St. Francis, Wisconsin; Bridget Madill of Kanata, Ontario, Canada; Marsha Harmon of Lemoore, California; Patricia A. Fletcher of Clarksville, Tennessee; John L. Reilly of Clearwater, Florida; Marion Mitchell MacKay of East Jordan, Michigan; Fredric Maxim Strahl of Granada Hills, California; and Shirley Lawrence Steele of Grinnell, Iowa.

## THE EXECUTIONER by Thomas A. Bowden

"Now, Mr. Wilson, tell the jury who you were carousing with that night. Was it your wife?"

Wilson lowered his eyes momentarily and spoke softly. "I was with my ex."

"And at the end of the evening, as you stood waiting for the train, what was your mood?"

"Exasperated. She was on my back all night. When I finally told her off, she exploded."

"And you just left her there on the deserted platform?"

"My wife was meeting the express at the station; I couldn't afford to excite her suspicions."

"Would you have stayed if you had known your ex was—"

"Expecting? She invented that story to milk me for cash."

"Extortion? But she already got heaps of money from you. Why try for more?"

"That's right."

"Pardon me?"

"Her boyfriend, Y, wanted more. He sponged off her shamelessly, and she feared him mightily."

"You lie!" yelled Y, leaping up at the back of the crowded courtroom.

"You couldn't stand her doublecrossing you!" Wilson exclaimed. "What's more, you're a yogi, so you'd know just how to twist her into submission. You followed us, waited till I boarded the train, then bent her unmercifully, leaving her there helpless, to die of exposure."

"X-rays will tell the story!" cried Wilson's attorney.

"Exhume the body!" ordered the judge. "And cuff that yogi!" Turning to Wilson, he added: "You're excused, for now."

Wilson stepped down and embraced his attorney. "Tell me, what are the prospects for my exoneration?"

"Why, excellent, of course!"

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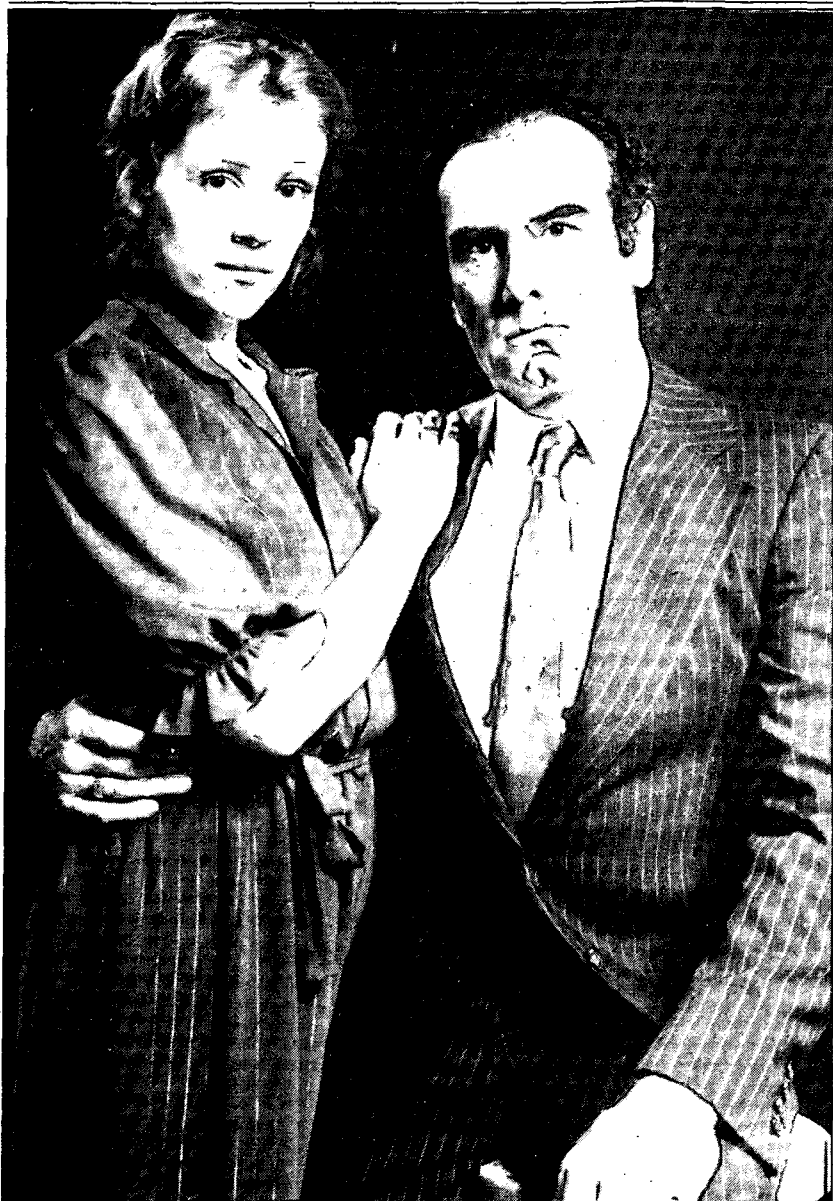
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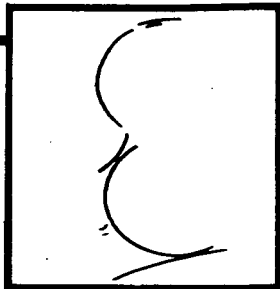
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Frances McDormand and Dan Hedaya as the bar owner and his wife in *Blood Simple*.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



A bar out on the strip in Texas, adultery between the wealthy bar owner's wife and a good looking bartender, a private detective's graphic report of what went on between the lovers in a motel. It's still the same old story, and still a compelling one. As long as the love triangle continues to exist, jealousy will lead to murder, and murder to the complications of guilt and the fears of detection that are the subjects of **Blood Simple**. And as long as moviemakers continue to deal with this kind of murder, they will probably work with Alfred Hitchcock in mind.

Hitchcock used the resources of his sets and camera to capture what it feels like to be caught up in jealousy, murder, intrigue, fear. His famous scenes painstakingly drew out the smallest details of an assassin's approach to his victim or the

process of disposing of a body. The producers of *Blood Simple* have made an entire movie in the manner of the selected moments in which Hitchcock could suspend the action in this way.

The jealous husband hires the private detective to kill his wife and her bartender lover, but the detective works out a way to doublecross him. There is a murder all right, and eventually another, followed by a killing in self-defense. But it is the husband who dies first. Up until the moment he is shot, it seems as though a perfect crime is being committed. But when the fact of his death begins to sink in for the detective and the lovers, they shift to irrational behavior. This is what is meant by "blood simple," an expression borrowed from Dashiell Hammett's novel, *Red Harvest*, and referring to a condition of simple-mindedness that seizes

on a murderer after he has shed blood. (One wonders if Hammett had in mind the descent into madness of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after they have dipped their hands in the blood of the murdered king. Shakespeare's idea of an ineradicable blood guilt makes a nice moral for *Blood Simple*. And Lady Macbeth's line, "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?," applies nicely to the movie's most serious flaw: the continuing and finally absurd pouring out of blood from the victim.)

In the anonymous rural Texas town where the action takes place, life is conducted in cars and bars, the characters sweat, and communication is conducted in short, inarticulate bursts of words (poorly recorded on the soundtrack). Actions speak louder than words in this environment, making it seem necessary for the camera to pan with excruciating slowness to let us see for ourselves what is in a room or just how dead a victim is after having been shot.

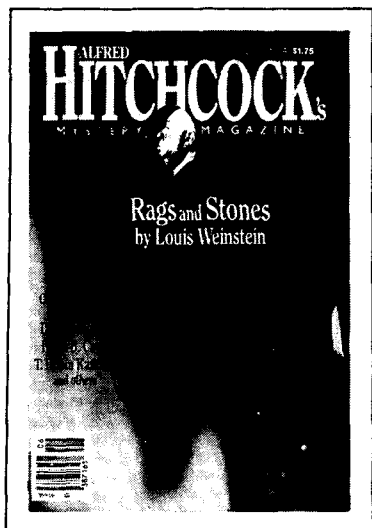
Because the characters say nothing to raise their motives above the level of lust and greed, we follow their actions with a clinical, dispassionate eye. The result is rather like what would have resulted if the entire action of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*,

with its increasingly sordid pair of murdering lovers, had been photographed with the drawn-out slowness of the killing scene in Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966), in which it seems that the victim will never succumb to the succession of knives and blunt instruments used to kill him.

It happened to Hitchcock that such scenes sometimes inspired certain moviegoers to watch them over and over, always laughing in the knowing way of cult fans. *Blood Simple* makes an evident appeal to this group by treating its murders and blood as grotesque jokes. In this it is a bit like *Psycho II*, the continuation of a Hitchcock classic that turned out to be very knowing and very shocking, but without profound appeal.

In the process of setting itself problems of exposition and then solving them with elaborately Hitchcockian camerawork, *Blood Simple* makes the final mistake of eliminating the element of detection. The viewer keeps wondering how anybody in authority is ever going to work out the intricacies of the plot. But although the characters commit their blunders out of fear of being discovered, no one ever comes onto the scene to deal with what has happened. As a result, *Blood Simple* comes across as an artful but academic exercise.

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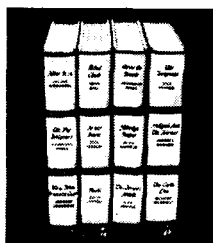
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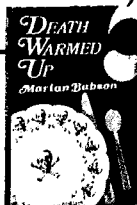
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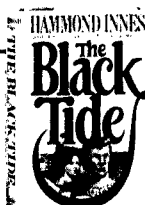
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